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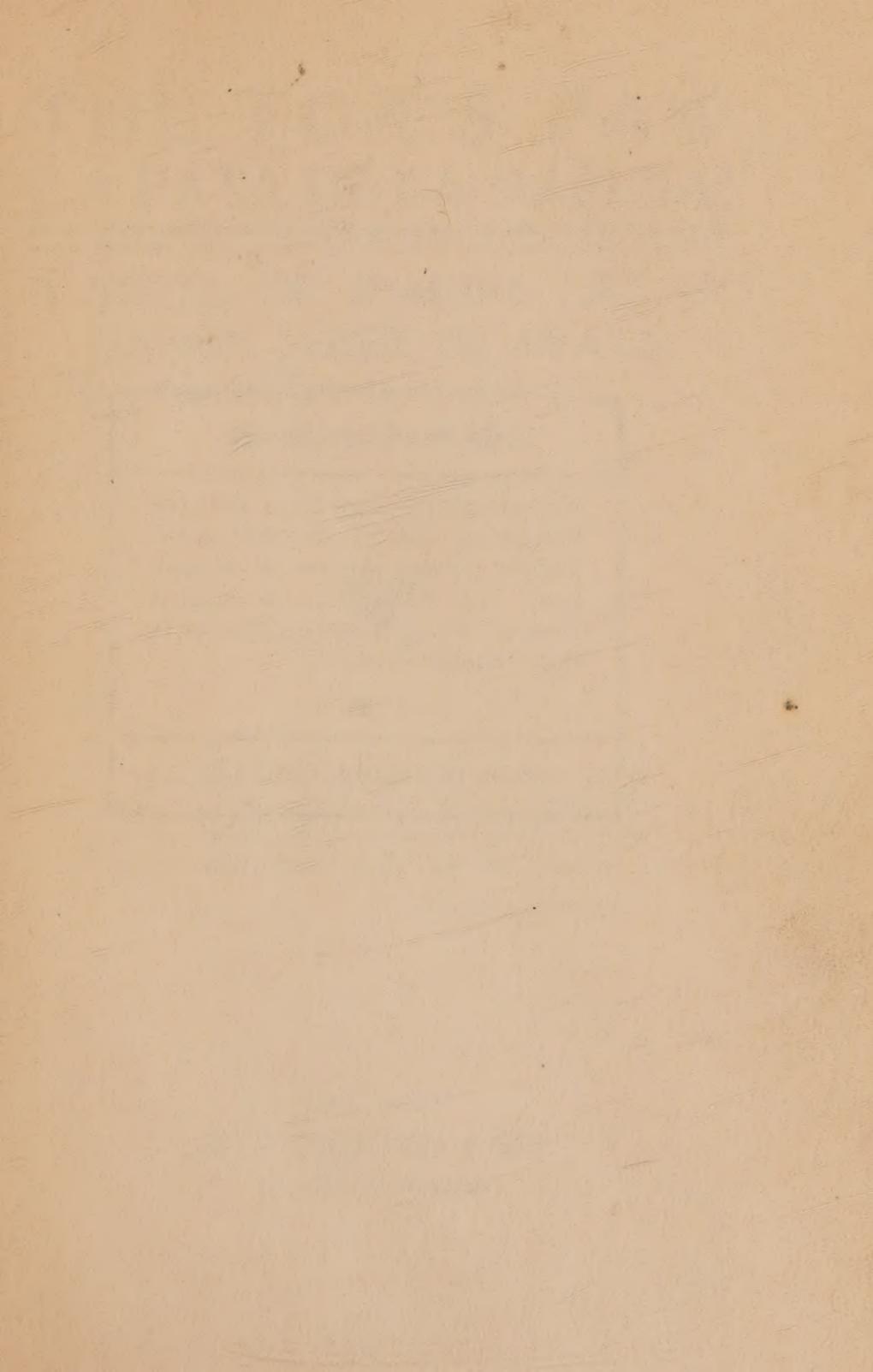
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FOX'S PAW

RAMÓN PÉREZ DE AYALA



By the Same Author

PROMETHEUS: THE FALL OF THE
HOUSE OF LIMON: SUNDAY SUN-
LIGHT. POETIC NOVELS OF SPANISH
LIFE. PROSE TRANSLATIONS BY ALICE P.
HUBBARD. POEMS DONE INTO ENGLISH BY
GRACE HAZARD CONKLING.



E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

THE FOX'S PAW

[LA PATA DE LA RAPOSA]

A NOVEL OF SPANISH LIFE BY
RAMÓN PÉREZ DE AYALA

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
BY THOMAS WALSH

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*"Dans la cas où personne n'y prendrait garde,
j'aurai encore retiré ce fruit de mes paroles, de
m'être mieux guéri moi-même et, comme le renard
pris au piège, j'aurai rongé mon pied captif."*

—ALFRED DE MUSSET.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Fox's Paw is the second book of Ramón Pérez de Ayala to be made available for American readers in English. The first was a collection of three novelettes published in 1920: *Prometheus*, a psychological portrait with a mood and almost a moral; *The Fall of the House of Limon*, and *Sunday Sunlight*, both lyrical treatments of "bossism" in Spanish politics. These stories, felicitously rendered into English by long standing admirers of the Spanish poet-novelist, Alice Hubbard and Grace Conkling, were warmly welcomed by American criticism. Not so by our public, which, as Ernest Boyd has sententiously observed, seems to have an unfailing instinct for avoiding good literature.

But such experiences are not new for Pérez de Ayala, who is one of the sincerest and most uncompromising artists writing in any language today. It is now just twenty-one years since his first book was published. The fifteen

volumes that have since appeared have each marked a step in the conquest of a vogue, which now embraces the two Spanish worlds and is advancing into French and Anglo-Saxon territory. However, there has been nothing spectacular about the literary career of Pérez de Ayala. He has not dominated the generation of Spanish writers—men now in their late forties or early fifties—which succeeded what will perhaps be called the age of Benavente and Galdós. Literary dominations are usually due to fortuitous circumstance, as a writer in some aspect of his work happens to reflect important practical tendencies of a moment in history. This moment passes, and with it the particular concern that engaged the public mind; and with it, accordingly, the fortune of the author who reflected or exploited that concern. To criticism is then left the task of dealing with the anomalous cases of writers who belong to the history of literature, without somehow belonging to literature.

The true artist stands in no fear of such a fate. When he has seen life whole and has given to his sense of life a full and complete expression he is independent of those fluctuations of public “taste,” so called, which de-

termine literary popularities. As a matter of fact, they are not fluctuations of "taste" at all, but merely changing directions of will, changing practical objectives, in national or human society. And it is just this quality of true art that larger and larger numbers of Ayala's contemporaries are recognizing in him. In the judgment of his countrymen he stands for some of the soundest achievements in contemporary Spanish letters, and is unquestionably to be counted among the men of the present who give greatest promise of entering the permanent literature of Spain.

* * *

The most comprehensive effort of Pérez de Ayala thus far, the effort longest sustained and representing his widest experimentation, has been the four novels, written between 1908 and 1913, of which *The Fox's Paw* is the third. In this tetralogy Ayala takes as his theme the development of a modern Spaniard from school days to maturity; studying the various influences which determine Spanish individuality and appraising the value of the latter.¹ *A.M.D.G.* (*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, the motto of the Jesuits) shows the life of Alberto Díaz de Guzmán in a Jesuit college. *Darkness*

on the Heights (*Tinieblas en las cumbres*) presents him in conflict with some of the problems of adolescence. In *The Fox's Paw* we see him in his early manhood, his character fully formed. In *Dancers and Trotters* (*Troteras y danzaderas*) we find him at last in the cesspool to which the national life, strangled, as Ayala might say, by the double grip of Army and Clergy on the machinery of the State, destines the gentlemen on whom it showers its material rewards but for whom it can find no serious employment. In these novels, in other words, Ayala shows the whole coherent process by which, in his view of things, Spain fails to utilize the genius it creates in such great abundance.

One need not point out that from these four novels a thesis might be deduced—a thesis of Spanish liberalism which, as contrasted with some other liberalisms past and present, still preserves a fresh contact with the pure liberal tradition of the Nineteenth Century. I note the fact just in passing, that the literary men of Spain, standing in scornful aloofness from the twin masters and yet loath to merge their lot with the programs of an insurgent proletariat, still find a source of fresh inspiration in

the great English thinkers of a century ago. One has to go to Spain to hear Spencer, and Huxley, and John Stuart Mill, not to mention Darwin or Ruskin or William Morris, still read and discussed with the enthusiasm of discovery. And I venture the suggestion that the sympathy Americans feel for Spanish minds like Ayala's or Unamuno's, or Araquistain's, especially as we approach them in their comment on affairs of the world, is due in part to our sharing Victorian culture in such goodly portion with them.

However, Ayala's ideas, as ideas or propaganda, are implicit only, and wholly subordinate, in his novels. These, we must again observe, are primarily works of art; and they subordinate, in the same way, other elements of story-telling which in current American criticism tend illegitimately to be regarded as problems of art. In *The Fox's Paw*, for example, the element of "plot" is a striking one, especially as Ayala has treated it. Any wide-awake American free-lance could have made two or three "thrillers" out of the materials assembled here: a detective story—the mysterious disappearance of Rosina, and the vindication of her supposed murderer; an "easy

money" intrigue, where an inheritance is lost and partly recovered; and a sentimental romance of international psychologies—Albert and Josephine, Albert and Nancy, Albert and Josephine. Not only this. A man like Upton Sinclair could have put to excellent purpose the theme implicit generally in *The Fox's Paw*: a system of education and its effect on a man in whom volition has been wholly submerged in the æsthetic instinct and who must then face the world with the advantages and handicaps this situation gives him. As a matter of fact, Ayala chooses, in most of his novels, to analyze modern Spanish life from the viewpoint of education; his people are really *formae mentis* produced by the intellectual notions and the moral ideas furnished by Spanish schools or by the traditions of Spanish home life. And as these minds, or rather these "souls"—for they are full grown personalities—are brought into contact with reality, situations arise which create the minor moods of Ayala's books, now humor, now pathos, now satire, which in turn unite to make up what might be called his criticism of modern Spain.

But all these things are presuppositions to Ayala's art, rather than the art itself. The essence, and to a large extent, the form, of the Ayala novel is determined by the fundamental problem of the author's spirit, which may be stated roughly as an attempt to transmute the world into terms of feeling. Ayala's people, for example, are elaborated with a thoroughness and a minuteness that may well be appreciated if they are compared with the characters of Blasco Ibáñez (two or three general and vigorous tendencies of will, wrapped in a physical description and settled in a picturesque environment). But if his people live, they live only in terms of feeling and to Ayala they have value not as people but as feeling. This, I believe, explains why Ayala is inclined to free himself from his story every now and then to express himself more directly in verse. This also is why he takes so little interest in the dramatic situations which spring out of his themes but which he treats lyrically rather than dramatically. This finally is why his characters reveal themselves less by their reactions to those dramatic situations—reactions which would necessarily be too general and too crude

—than by simple acts of no significance in the field of will but richly significant as to complex mental processes.

Though, in one sense, this spiritualization of the world has a certain analogy with modern philosophical idealism, Ayala is hardly, I should say, an idealist, so heavily does sensibility outweigh intellect in his attitude toward life. Nor is he, for all of his sensibility, an æsthetete in the *fin de siècle* sense of the terms: he is no experimenter in sensations, as D'Annunzio typically was and is. Ayala rather is a mystic, if we can strip that word of all its theological associations, and think of mysticism as a process of grasping reality directly as sentiment or feeling.

It is a feeling that embraces and suffuses all the work of Ayala, and which he refines and purifies to the sacrifice of everything else. His is a contemplative mood that shrinks from the shocks of life and basks in a certain mellow sunlight that illuminates even the most sordid things. If there is, along with this, a subtly acrid fragrance in the atmosphere of the Ayala novel, it comes from the very over-ripeness of æsthetic sophistication. For Ayala feels especially the weariness of the soul that only feels

—a sort of homesickness for action, a vague dissatisfaction with the æsthetic life, which, in their turn, give rise to a spirit of melancholy and to the bewilderment that springs from overstress of one or another of the soul's faculties.

* * *

Since the completion of the cluster of novels of which *The Fox's Paw* is, from a practical American point of view, the most fascinating, Ayala has written three others: in 1921, *Apollonio and Bellarmino*, a study in contrasts between an intellectual and a poetic mind, with an undercurrent of rare humor; in 1922, *Honeymoon* (*Luna de miel, luna de hiel*) ; and in 1923, *The Toils and Troubles of Urban and Simona* (*Los trabajos de Urbano y Simona*), twin romances which return again to the educational theme. His writings include also three volumes of verse, two volumes of criticism, and numerous short stories and articles contributed to various newspapers and reviews in Spain, South America and the United States. Ayala's Anglo-Saxon culture has already been noted. He has made various journeys to this country, the last in 1919, when he acted for a time as lecturer at Cornell University. About

ten years ago he married an American girl from Pennsylvania.

* * *

The title of Thomas Walsh to interpret this the most sensitive of contemporary Spanish writers, was guaranteed, it may be added, by Mr. Walsh's distinguished work as a pioneer in the introduction and translation of modern Spanish poetry.

ARTHUR LIVINGSTON.

*New York City,
April 23rd, 1924.*

PART FIRST
NIGHT

PART FIRST NIGHT

I

“L’homme n’est qu’un roseau le plus faible de la nature; mais c’est un roseau pensant. Mais quand l’univers l’écraserait, l’homme serait encore plus noble que ce qui le tue, parce qu’il sait qu’il meurt; et l’avantage que l’univers a sur lui, l’univers n’en sait rien.”—PASCAL.



N evening early in September, 1905. The summer was declining calmly. The ruddy sunset betokened autumn and the melancholy of its harvested fruits.

Pilares, the decrepit city, ancient asylum of monotony and silence—stretched out toward the setting sun more mute and absorbed than ever before. From time to time the medieval, the faithful, voice of the belfries trembled, as with a shuddering breath, through the stony organism. The city seemed to exhale a crimson solemn air; across Mount Otero, which acted as a high couch to protect it from the

northwinds, across the woods and meadows that surrounded it, the browns and golds of autumn impressed their noble touches upon the gay and frivolous verdures of the spring-time.

The street of Jovellanos was a broad provincial thoroughfare, spic and span and presumptuous. It ran along in its own fashion, skirting the meadowlands, so that the scanty traffic of Pilares did not follow its windings. It had no shops nor business places. The habitual silence of the town reached its fullness here. The larger part of the dwellers were absent on their vacations at the seashore. The houses with closed gates and sealed-up balconies showed an unseemly sadness. Two houses standing side by side gave forth the only signs of life along the empty line of lower floors. In one house the windows were half-way open; in the other they were swung out wide as if in thirst for fresh air. Now and then a curtain of yellow damask would flutter in the draught. The balconies were separated from each other by posts topped with artificial palms. Down to the street came sounds of household activities: the movement of chairs, the dusting of alcoves, and the hearty

laughter of youth. A maid, her hair in disorder, her face reddened, her jacket open, her arms exposed, leaned over the balcony nearest to the adjoining house, cautiously regarding the balcony at the side.

“Manolo, Manolo!” she murmured, insinuatingly.

Nobody answering, she turned and went inside, taking care, however, several times to knock the carpet-beater noisily against the neighboring balcony. Whereupon another feminine voice was heard:

“Don’t waste your time, Teresuca. No doubt he is on the other side of the house in the gallery.”

Teresuca suddenly disappeared from the balcony. As she stamped along, one of the posts with its artificial palm was seen to shake unsteadily, apparently uncertain whether to stand erect or to tumble to the earth; at last it decided to maintain its decorative perpendicularity.

In conformity with architectural traditions in Pilares, all the houses had sun-parlors in back—broad galleries shut in with windows, which, in the case of these two houses, opened on a large open space, free from buildings;

first came the flower beds and kitchen gardens of the two homes, then fields staked out for the streets and blocks of the future, and beyond, closing the view, the rear façades of the cluster of blackened, battered tenements on the street called Madreselva.

Teresuca came to a window in the gallery and called for Manolo, rattling with the cleaner in spite of her lack of success with it at the front of the house. The humble tool now showed that it possessed the powers of a magic rod in the hands of a fairy. At its signal one of the windows was opened slowly and from it emerged the sleek and smiling face, the shoulders and rolled-back sleeves, of a youth busy polishing some walking boots. Teresuca and Manolo took a long look at each other; Teresuca tightened up her lips; Manolo opened his jaws; the shoe under the polishing of his left hand shook convulsively. Neither seemed in a hurry to speak. At last Teresuca exclaimed:

“Stupid, give me your hand!”

Manolo instinctively stretched out a hand, but it held a black and greasy brush. He drew it back at once on suddenly becoming aware of his absentmindedness; and, covered

with confusion, stretched out the other inside the shoe. Then he drew this back as well, not knowing what to do, impatient with these base reminders of his servile condition. Teresuca broke into laughter and Manolo joined her.

“Hide them, man, hide them.”

Manolo shook out his arms with scornful jolts; shoes and brush fell down to the garden. Across the windows Manolo and Teresuca clasped their hands, gazing delightedly at each other and beginning a conversation half-affectionate, half-gossipy. They had been lovers for half a year. Teresuca, with the other servant Camila, had arrived the evening before to give two days to airing and regulating the house in advance of the return of their employers. During the summer they had exchanged letters, but Teresuca complained that Manolo had told her so little.

“So little! Why, there were two pages to every letter, girl!”

“Yes, philosophy and such stuff that I couldn’t make head or tail of. What a scholar you are! But I should prefer to have you say nice things the way men do in the novels.”

As a fact, Manolo was an author; he had begun in secretly carrying off books from his

master's library; once alone, he devoured them without resting a second. He borrowed by preference works on philosophy, ethics, and sociology, for the very reason, probably, that he understood them least of any—though this did not prevent him from reading them from beginning to end, and over and over again until he had memorized the most labyrinthine paragraphs. One night his true vocation was revealed to him; a smiling remote ideal came before his mind as the final climax of his life—if only some day he could get to be town-councillor!

Never had such glowing ambitions entered the head of a valet before. His first literary attempts showed traces of revolutionary virus. He decided to be a socialist; but at headquarters in Pilares they told him that neither Catholics nor house-servants could join the party. To the question, "Would you like to give up service and become a 'worker'?"—Manolo answered: "Impossible—I am devoted to my master." In fact, he professed affection for his employer; also in fact Manolo, out of the generous funds placed in his hands for household expenses, was amassing, through secret commissions, a fund on his own account,

which did not prevent him from professing radical ideas, cultivating his intellect, acquiring a vocabulary of long words like *archisupercrematisticamente*, impressing his relatives with the jumble of his wisdom, and sending under a pen-name to the Pilares *Weekly* tremendous articles beginning in this way: "The scorn of circumstances is the firmest basis of metempsychosis." In short he was a disappointed socialist and a presumptive capitalist. Mystery of human existence in which the logic of the sentiments and the logic of the mind frequently result in such abysmal divorce! On one hand, Manolo was a humble creature, excessively so, resigned and self-obliterating before a superior, in particular his master Albert; and on the other hand, a creature Olympian and pompous with those he considered his inferiors. It was this kind of logic that had involved him in a wild passion for Teresuca, the maid of the De Oliva family. Teresuca was pretty and clever. The youths of Pilares held dubious views regarding her virtue. Manolo was aware of this and was said to suffer ceaseless suspicions. But the lass responded to his affection with such delightful concessions that he was able to put aside all his

doubts regarding her conduct in general. Besides, the De Olivas paid her a generous wage which she, with the aid of God or the devil, managed to increase so as to put away in the savings bank several thousand pesetas. This had a tender appeal with Manolo, since it showed certain dispositions in Teresuca to become a modest provider. They had decided on an early marriage. In physique Manolo was a young man of twenty-five; his face flat and sensual, with a narrow forehead. Teresuca was considered to be about twenty; her eyes were keen and as quick to smiles as to anger; they distracted the attention from the rest of her face and figure; they drew and held the gaze like serpents. She left an impression of mixed pleasure and distrust, of ardor, at times cold and cunning.

She whispered to Manolo with a bitter grimace:

“Ah, Nolo, you don’t know how I desire to get out of this service. Bah, these miserable people! Such airs, such ceremonies! It is as if we servants had no mothers at all. I swear to you, Nolo, that when I read in the newspapers of where serving-maids kill their young

masters, they have my full sympathy. What do you say?"

Manolo, engrossed in his emotions, had no time to produce one of his magnificent speeches. With manly strength he pressed his beloved's hands and smiled stupidly. Suddenly he said:

"To-night you will be alone in the house with Camila," and he looked down the gallery into the garden.

"Hush, stupid, hush with your suggestions." The eyes of the girl closed and opened again caressingly. Taking on her usual expression she asked:

"And your master?"

"Sleeping off his spree of yesterday."

"High life!"

"I didn't hear him come in; but this morning when I went into his room he was like a log. On the floor there was a comb dropped by some visitor. I don't know what happened in the night."

"My! My! Yet he does not seem a bad sort."

"Not so bad——"

"When is his marriage to take place?"

"It may happen any day."

"You see, he is so much alone, always alone——"

"Hush——" Manolo stuck his head inside the house and stuck it out again. "The bell is ringing. Good-bye, I shall come right back. Wait for me."

He was gone to take his orders. Teresuca remained leaning against the balcony watching the sunset. Along the garden wall stole a black cat on soft, elastic tread. Coming in front of Teresuca it lengthened out and gazed at her.

"Caligula, Caligula, puss, puss," called the maid as she clicked her fingers.

Caligula did not appreciate that it was wanted, but moved along the wall with elegant decorum.

An old woman joined Teresuca.

"To whom were you speaking just now?"

"To Caligula."

"What is that?"

"That is the name of Señor Albert's cat."

"That young man strikes me as a bit cheesy on the topnot." Camila screwed her forefinger against her forehead.

A setter-dog of a ruddy coat began to bark and jump around Albert's garden.

"Sultan, be good," called Teresuca.

"Well," remarked Camila, "that's a fine Christian name for the creature!"

II

Albert opened his eyes and looked around him. His consciousness came slow and painful as, through a spell of witchcraft, his soul was awakening in a new, strange, and dull body.

From the ceiling an electric bulb, shaded in a red glass globe, shed forth an early morning glow. To Albert it appeared like some baby sun arising in a helpless way and throwing over the furniture of the alcove a lot of arbitrary, senseless shadows.

Albert's throat and tongue were parched. His brain seemed a hopeless protuberance; his limbs, unanswering to his will, lay half-asleep and now and then were pierced with subtle needles. His whole frame seemed a strange aggregation of parts with only a dumb sensibility to connect them. In a word he was suf-

fering the last stages of a recovery from his bout. He looked down and found he was not undressed. Pulling himself to his feet with an effort, he tried to reach the wash-basin, dashed some cold water in his face, and poured out and gulped down a glass of Eno's Fruit Salts. Then he examined himself in the mirror; he was pale and showed fatigue and listlessness, realizing with a touch of satisfaction, what otherwise would have concerned him, that he needed an early and thorough rest. Drawing back the heavy hangings he went into the outer room which opened on a *patio* fronted with glass. The day was overclouded. He tumbled, rather than seated himself, in a deep red armchair and tried to collect his thoughts.

Little by little he began to orient himself. His mind went back over recent events; how many hours had he been sleeping? What had become of Rosina who had accompanied him? He recalled how they both had come back from the Gate of Pilares with a party of girls and boys after witnessing a total eclipse of the sun. Albert was a youth deprived prematurely, one by one, of the vital illusions, the rational limitations; he had lost the motive power of those principles which we are used to write in

capital letters: Religion, Morals, Science, Justice, Wisdom, Riches, etc.

As the stars die out in the skies, so from his soul were disappearing all the great illuminations of his childhood. Only one sustained him, pure and serene in the void—the star of Beauty with its faithful satellite Glory, the immortal memory of mankind. But at the moment of the full eclipse when darkness of extraordinary thickness had spread over the earth, his soul was overcome entirely, so that like the great orb which had ceased to shine, he understood that beauty itself was merely human, perishable, and inane like everything else; to pursue it was as vain as to attempt to hold the hurricane. He had reached that state, which in the lives of the saints is known as insensibility.

Thus far he had sought in art not merely a stimulus but a mitigation of his longings, a shelter where he might take refuge while forgetting the things of life, as Schopenhauer recommends. Now it appeared to the eyes of his spirit with dubious certitude, enormously ridiculous, and he blushed at the childish stupidity that had enlisted him in so empty a quest.

Getting up from the armchair he approached a small bookcase and took out some copies of Schopenhauer.

"Lubricous old cynic, how stupid you were and what a lot of harm you have done me!" as he threw them out the *patio* windows. He turned again to the bookcase and studied the backs of the silent little witnesses ranged together.

"Here I have the very spinal chord of humanity; immense vertebrate as short-lived as a louse. Of what use is all your force or your pretension?" Seizing them in heaps he tossed them into the *patio*. The sounds of sharp, joyous barking caused him to desist.

"That's Sultan." He mused for an instant over the evident happiness of the dog. Then he returned to his task of demolishing, this time turning his rage on the casts of classic and Renaissance sculpture ornamenting the studio. In a moment they were lying in fragments on the pavement below. He followed by raising his hand against the sketches he had made himself; he tore them down roughly. He also seized on the reproductions of famous pictures that came within his reach, until happen-

ing on the Mona Lisa of Leonardo he stood spellbound, with his eyes fixed in superstitious terror upon the face that seemed alive with still and supernatural life. It seemed to Albert as if it symbolized in its animated smile what for him was the dark brutality of the universe; that the face of the Gioconda was no longer human but the veiled emblem of the sense and expression of the world. He put the picture aside as if to avoid its enchantment, and rang his bell.

Manolo touched his hands to his head on entering:

“What day is to-day?”

“It is Thursday.”

“What time is it?”

“Six o’clock in the afternoon.”

“Call up Cachan on the telephone. Let him send a carriage as soon as he can for the road to Cenciella. You can get my valise packed. Have everything ready in half an hour.”

“What books will you take with you, sir?”
Manolo showed his impatience.

“None,” answered Albert without looking at the servant.

“And the paint-box?”

"Never mind it."

"Shall I pack up some paper for writing or sketching?"

"I told you, nothing."

"And if you are bored?"

"That's my affair."

"Some food for the journey?"

"Will you shut up? I don't want anything. Bring me now some milk and tea. Take your own supper before we start. Have them send a station-cart."

Once more alone Albert lighted his briar pipe and went out on the terrace. His heart felt lighter, as if sustained with new force and joy. There had come upon him in its silent strength a new mood, that old Christian illusion which led the monks into the deserts, the missionaries across the seas, and the ardent virgins to the pacifying silence of the cloister. He would endeavor to forget himself. His teacher would be Sultan.

III

He was still smoking when Manolo announced the arrival of Señor Hurtado. He

had little desire for conversation, but he resigned himself to events.

Telesforo Hurtado was a man of some thirty-two years, fat, jaundiced and olive-hued; his eyes were small and stuck out like those of a wild boar; his skin was oily; his mustache falling over his mouth seemed to be losing color; his clothing was black. He entered saluting Albert with great affection.

"My dear brother-in-law that is to be——" Then, catching sight of the wrecked apartment: "But what has happened here?"

"My own doing, Telesforo. Don't be surprised; I have suddenly realized that art is nothing else than another farce and——"

"Tut, tut. Just fads of artists."

Albert raised his shoulders. Hurtado went on:

"As for poetry——" Albert nodded his head—"You are joking."—Albert turned and dropped his shoulders.—"What should I say about it, I a poor bank-clerk. I should die of grief if there were no poetical faculties provided to sustain me. Surely even without the love of Leonor. But who says love, says poetry. Leonor is my muse. I am a senti-

mental creature; you may believe that. Ah, if you had only made verses——”

“I have done so.”

“Yes, and very pretty ones. To tell the truth, I didn’t understand them clearly.”

“Of course, but that was my fault.”

“No, no, I don’t wish to insinuate that. Yours had much learning.”

“If you will permit me, Telesforo, I will go on washing and dressing.” He put down the pipe, drew the hangings, and arranged the tub and towels and sponge. “You can go on talking. I hope not to offend your modesty.”

“Go ahead. It is about time you were stirring. You bohemians——”

“Yes, we are animals of strange breeds.”

“So witty in yourselves!”

“Lucky, isn’t it?”

“All right, but hurry; the train starts at eight.”

“What train?” asked Albert, speaking through his shirt, at that moment over his head.

“The train for Villaclara. I am going there for three days and as Leonor writes me you are also expected. Hasn’t Josefina written you about it?”

"Josefina!" murmured Albert as though to himself. He stood for a moment with bare chest and arms crossed. "Telesforo, I cannot go. I have some work to do at the country-house and my carriage comes for me at eight. As you are going to Villaclara, I shall ask you to explain to Josefina that for several days I have been too busy to write her; she need not worry; you have seen me and I am looking well; that I think of her very often and always with affection."

"Poor Fina!"

"What's that?"

"I am a simple man. Sincerity is my first virtue. And as I am sincere, let me tell you, that in my opinion you are not in love with Fina."

"In love?" Albert was sitting on a stool taking off a slipper. He threw it across the room with scorn as if for the words, "in love."

"I don't know what that saying means."

"Saying! Yes, it is a saying. Go on."

"All I can be certain of, is that Fina is the first woman who has aroused definite emotions in me. That her character suits mine and that I could marry nobody else except her—that is, if I ever marry. She is an ideal creature——"

and distractedly he let drop the other slipper.

"Very well then, get married without delay. How would you like to fix the same day as ours. In December, perhaps; it is a fine month. Don Medardo is choking with cash. In our bank alone he has a deposit of over one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. A pretty nest-egg."

"Bah!" growled Albert, as the water ran down his back. "Will you do me the kindness not to believe that the bank-account of that returned emigrant is to be estimated in my desire to marry—Ouch!" He expanded his chest under the cold sponge.

"Pardon me, I don't quite understand."

"I say, my good sir, that I will not sell myself for money."

"I don't say that you will. I myself haven't got a cent and even I wouldn't marry for money. But where there is no money there is trouble, as everybody knows. For you, with plenty of cash in your own hands, it is all very well." Albert, covered with a plush gown, the hood thrown back, came and sat down beside Telesforo, looking at him in amiable condescension. "While we are on the subject, they tell

me that you have a tidy sum on deposit in the bank of Meumiret. Confidentially, I may tell you not to trust them too much. Certain things I hear—listen, just as soon as I marry Leonor, I shall give my principal attention to commercial matters; my chief has promised me his interest. Then will be the time to transfer your account to us. I can assure you that I shall watch your interests as I would my own."

"There will be no trouble about that. We shall discuss it later."

Hurtado, highly elated, squeezed Albert's arm repeating:

"Get married, man, what the devil is the matter with you?"

"You are speaking of love to me at a time when I have other things to claim me."

He stood up and dropped the dressing-gown from his chest and taking a green bottle he emptied some of its contents in the palm of his hand and rubbed it over his breast and arms. The room was redolent of the fragrance of meadows in the morning. The eyes of Hurtado were studying, so that when he married Leonor he might imitate all the details of this toilet.

"That odor is very fine, what is it?"

"Just toilet-water."

"Let me see the label? Atkinson. What do they ask for it."

"Fourteen pesetas."

"Impossible!"

"I bought it at Prado's."

"An extortioner."

"Oh no; it has cost me about the same in London."

The bell rang noisily.

"It must be Jiménez."

"Then I shall get out. I don't care for him.

Au revoir, Albert."

In the passage Jiménez and Hurtado met. Jiménez was heard saying in his mocking way:

"Hello, Hurtado; my, how you are perspiring! When are we going to be allied to Don Medardo?"

"What a joker you are!"

Jiménez entered without paying the slightest attention to the manifest upheaval that was visible there. He held a newspaper in his hands and without any other ceremony than a melodramatic tone he ordered Albert:

"Read that!"

Albert took the newspaper:

"A subject of conversation throughout

Pilares is the strange happening of last night. It appears that certain men-about-town, well known in good society, made a visit to the city gates in company with some soiled doves equally well-known among the questionables. They went, according to their plans, to witness the eclipse of the sun; but all that they were able to certify was the eclipse of their own good sense through their excessive potations. They are said to have practised all kinds of disorder, disturbing the patriarchal peace of the country, scandalizing the townsfolk, and, above all, shocking the womenfolk. According to our information, the reckless damsels even affronted the modesty of some priests of the Pious Schools who had gone out to study the eclipse, in the interests of science. The most serious part, however, is coming, for it is said that after a bacchanalian revel of the most depraved description, worthy of the days of the pagans, they arrived in Pilares in a state that may be imagined. But it happens that one of the wild doves has disappeared. All to-day it has been impossible to locate her whereabouts. There is suspicion of foul play and certain questionable circumstances point toward a young artist already known for his irregularities.

"We trust that the executive and judicial bodies will not be restrained by the influence of the bosses. We object to our homes being the scene of such scandals. Are we in Zululand? Can we tolerate such conditions?"

"What simpletons!" was all that Albert answered.

Jiménez, while Albert was reading the gazette of *Pilares of the Future*, had time to remark the general disorder of the scene, his eyes, ordinarily gray and merry, looked about with dark suspicion.

"What has happened here?"

"A spiritual crisis."

"A Bacchic crisis, you mean."

"No, no, a spiritual crisis. Alcohol had nothing to do with what startles you here."

Jiménez then asked:

"And Rosina?"

"How should I know, dear Jiménez?" And although he had no desire to laugh, he did so openly, for the face of Jiménez, ordinarily mobile and comic, was still more grotesque in its seriousness. "Perhaps it is you who have written this notice in the paper?"

Albert's face was so serene that Jiménez instantly denied the accusation.

"No, I don't want to offend you. Nor do I wish to joke about it. The fact is that when one is drunk one does not know what one does, especially when, like you yesterday, one is on a first spree; but, in curiosity, as a fact, did you bring Rosina here?"

"I think so; that is, I am sure I did."

"And then?"

"Let me remember. We came in between the curtains, she first, I following. I saw myself in the mirror and imagined that I existed no longer, that what I beheld was the projection, shadow, or ghost of a previous existence; I said no end of stupidities and I think I must have lost my senses at that moment."

"Then?"

"Then, I don't know. I lay fully clothed for some hours on the bed; Rosina must have lifted me into it. It seemed as though my body belonged to somebody else. Later, I imagined that not only my body but my mind as well was another's. I have given up art for the present. I desire to forget many things and need a period of rest; therefore, I have planned to start from here to-day, this very minute, for the country."

"That's all right; but think for a minute

what significance this will have for the newspaper; how it will look to the judge when you have escaped—escaped, do you hear?"

"Come, come, man——" and Albert shook him by the arm to emphasize his absurdity. "Do you think Rosina won't reappear? It is possible that, frightened at my condition or thinking I was dead, she fled from the house. If such were her impression, I can hardly disapprove of her conduct."

"Nevertheless, I think you should not go immediately."

"There's Cachan now. I must finish dressing."

Albert rang the bell and Manolo appeared.

"Are the valises ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then start down with them. Listen; I am taking Sultan and Telemaque."

"Telemaque? Who is Telemaque?" opening his eyes.

"The cat."

"Ah, the kitten. This is a fine time to run with quadrupeds."

"Its claws are cut," added Albert.

"Poor creature," declared Jiménez in a

dolorous voice. He took up a fragment of plaster.

"It looks like a breast."

"So it is; it belonged to the Venus de Milo."

"Poor lady; and this piece of impropriety?"

He showed a piece of a woman's leg.

"It belonged to the Venus de Medici."

"Don't you respect anything?" asked Jiménez, as he stirred up the debris with his feet. "Ah yes, there is one woman who has been preserved here. Who is she?" and he pointed to the Giaconda.

"The Veil of Isis."

"What?"

"That which was, which is, which shall be. No mortal hand shall lift the veil of her immortality."

Jiménez was starting to mimic these mystic words when Telemaque began to fill the house with her wailings amid the interjections of Manolo inducing her to occupy her basket.

"I've got to go," said Albert as he went out followed by Jiménez.

Manolo had seized Telemaque with a piece of cloth to protect himself from her vicious scratches and without looking at her tried to stuff her into the basket as though she were a

roll of soiled linen. But the cat drew herself up mewing loudly and kept springing out at every chance.

"We had better leave her behind, Señor."

"Manolo is right," added Jiménez.

"Impossible. I have thrown out all my books; my only studies for the future are to be Sultan and Telemaque."

Jiménez shrugged his shoulders: "You are crazier than a goat." It was necessary to tie the cat in the basket.

"Let's be off. Have you put Colman's Mustard and the Worcestershire Sauce in the baskets?"

"Yes, Señor."

They went out and Albert got inside the carriage with Sultan. Manolo climbed to the box-seat with the valises beside the driver, the cat in the basket held on his knees. Jiménez and Albert said good-bye.

"Start ahead," cried Albert.

The carriage started. From the balcony Teresuca threw her lover a glance of reproach and sorrow.

IV

They journeyed through the upper end of the city along the public park. To Albert's mind came back the evening when, at practically this same hour, he had crossed the gardens arm in arm with Rosina; there was still a pair of lovers whispering in the shadows and the stars shone through the foliage. What had become of Rosina, he thought. The brass band was beginning to render its municipal programme—a metallic clamor that startled the night with sentimental screams. The carriage went on and turned across the plain. The night grew black and threatening. When they reached the open Molleda, Albert asked the driver to halt and got out of the carriage. The land stretched out to the horizon, a treeless plane like a bituminous lake. Against the western sky hovered a livid translucence.

Albert had a singular fondness for the desert, wasted and orphaned of all vegetation. It seemed to represent a materialized existence; the hardness and dryness he attributed to the mystics in their ardors of divine contemplation. Often he would ride out to

Molleda and spend long hours reading, with a bare black rock for his pillow.

Thunder sounded afar off. The clouds were gathering in streaks of red.

"It is coming on us," growled the driver. "Get in, Señor, and let us hurry. I am afraid we shall have trouble before we reach Cenciella. The horses are frightened."

Hardly had they started when the rain came down in torrents; the winds broke out and the thunder bellowed fiercely. At Pena, where they arrived after a hasty run of a quarter of an hour, the carriage pulled up before a sheltered hovel. Telemaque raged against her cage as Albert, Manolo, the driver, and Sultan entered the *chigre* or cider-press. A group of blackened miners were playing cards and drinking; they turned to study the new arrivals with eyes that shone white in their dusky sockets.

Albert was hungry. His body, recovered from its recent debauch, felt agile, elastic, and full of energy. He wanted to run, to jump, to climb mountains, and break-in wild colts. He asked for food; they brought him sardines, bread, and cider. He was so occupied with himself that he did not notice how the miners

stared at him, as they cracked their gross jokes so that he might hear. They struck the table showing their white teeth as they laughed. A noisy rattle at last called Albert's attention to the group. His thoughts, coming back from far away, suddenly presented the scene as some mystic spectacle. His glance was clear and deep with spiritual light, before which the vague forces of instinct fell back in embarrassment.

One of the miners got up and staggered over to Albert who watched him approach with a curious artistic lack of interest. The miner's light movement, his stringy neck and head, his bovine strength, made Albert think he had before him one of the statues of Meunier stirring with life. His lips softened into a smile as the miner came and raised his cap:

"Won't you take a glass of cider, young gentleman?"

"I am drinking already. Have one yourself," and he calmly poured out a glass and passed it toward the miner. Then he handed him the bottle. "For you and your friends."

The miner turned back to his group and from that moment they devoted themselves to their game in discreet silence.

The tavern where Albert found himself was like a picture after Jordaens or Teniers, alive and full of movement. From the garden side through a large portal came in an odor of roses and mallows with the breath of the wet earth. From time to time the lightning brightened up the scene beyond with its fierce blue flame; there was a sudden view of one of the pictures of Patinir with their brilliant diaphanous landscapes seen in the shadows of lakes of sleepy listless waters.

From a house next door came the dronings of an accordion. A girl was singing a simple melancholy tune suggesting the romances of Grieg or Rimsky-Korsakoff. To the beat of Albert's hands the keeper of the *chigre* appeared at the red curtains, at the same moment as a cat ran from underneath.

"Can't we have the performer and singer come to join us?" The cat approached and rubbed against Albert's ankles; he at this moment was showing himself the friend of all the world. Cats, host, miners, furniture, barrels, and even the light of the candles, the moaning of the accordion, the breath of the soil and the roses were all the objects of his universal amiability. Remedios, that was the name of

the host's daughter, came in and sat down beside him. She was plump and milky white, with brown hair, ruddy lips, black eyes and lashes. She brought a suggestion of the fat, jolly women who in the kermesses of Rubens laugh loudly as some drunken Fleming puts his hands to their breasts. Her skirt was of red, as glowing as the vermilions of Fra Angelico which had always deeply affected Albert. Such were the suggestions that stirred through his memory.

"You sing very nicely, little girl." He spoke for something to say.

"Hush, Señor, please; you only make fun of me." She put her head on one side so that her loose hair fell over her shoulder across her breast. She stole a glance at Albert, her hand gracefully lying against her heart. She lifted her body into a countrified dignity as though she were the Mnemosyne of Lysippus.

"Who was playing the accordeon?"

"What on earth do you mean by accordeon?"

The father, standing beside her, turned sharply and interrupted:

"Accordeon is the proper name for the *finharmonica*. You know very well what it means and don't make a fool of yourself." He

stood, his arms crossed with a gesture half crafty, half like the Egyptian priests in the Museum of the Louvre. His face, spotted from erysipelas, showed his fatherly pride.

"She plays the *finharmonica* herself, Señor."

"That's some accomplishment. Let us hear her."

Remedios started the bellows and began to perform a monotonous waltz, singing:

"At thy parting went my soul from me;
That kiss of thine within the bower
Did slay me there;
Alas, that I must tell thee so."

As she sang she showed her teeth white and regular, and at times her little red tongue. The miners in the midst of their card game stopped to listen; but the absurdity of the words and music broke sharply on Albert's enjoyment. He said:

"It is very pretty, but that's enough."

All his senses seemed satisfied. The smooth velvet cheeks of Remedios seemed to Albert like some ripened fruits in which to bury the teeth or delight the sense of touch. He raised his hand to her face and closed his eyes to take the sensation more intensely.

"Come, come," growled one of the miners roughly.

"What's the matter?" asked the host sneeringly. "It seems to me that some of these days I shall close my doors to you, in spite of the little I shall lose in your trade."

Another miner, the largest and heaviest, rose to his feet. He spoke as he lurched his shoulder aggressively, like some Colleone after Verrochio or some cock of the walk.

"Some of these days I am going to cut out that tongue of yours, Parrulo."

"In my own house I'm the boss," answered Parrulo, without stopping from counting the money Albert was paying him. "Many thanks, Señor—at your service."

The host and his daughter stood in the doorway until the carriage started off down hill to the merry jingle of the bells. Manolo and the driver were laughing to kill themselves until Albert prodded them with his stick, a *makila* from the Pyrenees with its heavy ferule—

"Can you not keep still for a moment?"

It troubled him that their chatter should clash with the still soft voice beginning to whisper in his heart.

They reached Cenciella about midnight.

Albert accompanied by Manolo walked up the lane along the walls of the property to the house of the caretaker. He knocked with his stick against the door where a dog began to bark furiously.

"Azor, Azor; shut up, Azor," called Albert, but the barking grew fiercer and fiercer. Sultan trembled against the feet of his master.

"That animal has forgotten me."

"Who the devil is knocking?" asked the caretaker, Celedonio, from inside the house.

"I."

"The master! I am coming instantly. Shall I open the door in front?"

"No, open here. I shall go through the garden."

Celedonio came out in his shirt-sleeves with a lantern in his hand.

"Well, it is the master. I am surprised! at this hour. What a thunder-storm! Where did it strike you? This way, this way, take care of the plantings."

Azor rushed out of the garden. "Azor, Azor," shouted Celedonio to scare him off. Showing his teeth the dog was about to spring on Albert who swung his stick and brought it down on the animal's shoulder. Azor with a

whine fell to the ground. Celedonio turned the light to see his injuries. Even Sultan slunk around with his tail between his legs.

"He has a broken leg."

Albert leaned over the dog that looked up at him with humid unreproachful eyes. Wagging his tail with an expression in his eyes and other demonstrations Azor showed that at last he had recognized his master and seemed to ask his forgiveness, saying, "You have broken my paw; very well; but I have three others; and a tail besides, if you will count that." It was thus that Albert interpreted the spirit of his watchdog. He smoothed him down lovingly, and Azor seemed to be distracted with delight.

V

The more I see of people
The better I like dogs.

Azor remained lame. Through necessity he quickly learned to walk on three feet and did so with an odd grace that was a pleasure to behold.

His breed was not of the clearest canine

purity. His origins were obscure and rather complicated like those of certain royal dynasties, with features somewhat changeable and undefined. Variegated were the contrasting breeds that might claim a part in the make-up of Azor. In his ancestry might be counted honorable names, regular and aristocratical unions joined with adulteries, illegitimacies and haphazard alliances. Altogether he was as complete an individual as you could find. Beneath his psychic personality and the aptitudes of his forces lurked a sum of *doggishness*. As for his traits, they were indiscernible and changing; sometimes he appeared like a wolf, treacherous and cruel; on the other hand, he softened into a character of ridiculous softness. Long-legged and gawky, his tail too short, his poor coat of mixed chestnut brown and sorrel——

His domestic fate was all unworthy of his warrior descent; but he showed signs of great magnanimity in never exhibiting any rancor against the hand that had broken his leg. He established a sort of friendship with Sultan and passed days and nights at the side of Albert, renouncing with antique stoicism his ancient office of night-watchman of the farm.

"Azor, my boy," Albert called to him one morning. The dog listened with his ears alert. "Fortune is the enemy of men and dogs. While all goes well, we never learn our capacities. It was necessary for you to lose a paw before you learned to walk on three legs. I ask you, why have you not tried to walk on two legs before necessity calls for it?"

Thenceforth he tried to convert Azor into a dog of wisdom and acrobatics. The animal lent itself gladly to study, in spite of difficulties and dangers. Both dog and master gained thereby—Azor in agility, Albert in instinct, to such a point, indeed, that his senses came to exercise a veritable tyranny over him.

The neighbors in Cenciella, learning that Albert had arrived in the country, seemed hurt at the seclusion in which he lived; seeing that at other times he had been so friendly with the people of the vicinity. When Rufa, the old domestic who had charge of the purchases, went about at her duty, they asked about Don Albert.

"What shall I tell you?" answered the old woman. "Never have we seen the like. He broke Azor's leg and now teaches him tricks. When he has finished with the dogs he turns

to the chickens, then to the cat, passing the whole day among the animals."

"He doesn't go out for mass?" asked another.

"You know he never did. He takes after his father in that, God forgive him."

"Does the widow call on him?"

"The widow? Bah, bah! Thus far he has not seen her, as he doesn't leave the house. But she, all day long, leaning over the wall!—You know the gardens adjoin, a wall between, the widow's ground higher up——"

VI

The country place stood about half a kilometer outside of Cenciella. Before the plateresque façade was a circular space of sand flanked with stone benches, backed on either side by royal poplars. At each end of the edifice ran the high walls of the estate, forming two right angles, running down behind, and in the hollow marking the boundary between Albert's garden and the lands of the widow Ciorretti. Her grounds occupied the highest part of the ridge, so that she was able

to oversee what went on in her neighbor's property.

The widow was a showy matron, a native of Piedmont. She had hair of copper hue, skin like dark cheese, and sported a large collection of freckles; her lips were heavy and always wet; the pupils of her eyes, half gray, half amber, shone like a cat's; her eyebrows and lashes were almost white and clung around her eyes like those of a bay mare; she delighted to show her neck which was full and double. To hide her excess of fat she corsetted herself so tightly to the hip that her breast took on a compactness rigid and majestic. In walking she shook her skirt with great freedom and displayed her calves as high as the knee, usually decked out in stockings of soft tints such as lilac, strawberry, seal-browns, and tobacco-color, with boots of bronze or metallic finish half way up her legs. As a result of the full harmony of her natural perfections and fineries she possessed a sort of spongy attraction or futile suggestion for the lazy curiosity of a summer afternoon.

The sad story of her widowhood was well known throughout Cenciella and Pilares; as well as the grief she bore and the simple man-

ner in which she strove to recover from her conjugal loss. Her husband, Antonino Cioretti, had been a tremendous man, physically as well as mentally; ardent, corpulent, and vigorous as a Roman of the times of Romulus; and at the same time shrewd, enterprising, and persevering. He established a hat factory in Pilares and with such success that in two years he was able to set up his coach. Like the good fellow that he was, even in his own eyes, he delighted to flaunt on horseback through the twisting streets of Pilares. The local damsels, dried up and anemic from their retired life and the excess of their pious practices, seeing him pass so glorious in his saddle as they sat embroidering or reading the Golden Legend near their windows, envied mutely the lot of Pia Octavia Cioretti, the wife of the Italian. His two horses, Dante and Petrarca, one of rosemary, the other of dappled chestnut, were broken for the shafts as well as the saddle. When the married pair went forth together in the coach, a mylord with rubber tires, they were driven by Joselin, the *Chelu*, a character well known in Pilares circles, a shark of sharp and roguish face.

For the dwellers in Pilares, the Ciorettis

were the very keystone of epicurean style, and they were always pictured as wrapped in the very lap of luxury. But it happened that one morning, without the least ado, the eminent hat-maker passed away. Like the matron of Ephesus, Pia Octavia desired to die and be laid away, face to face with her dear spouse so beloved and so loving. She refused all the consolations of friends and acquaintances, crying out that death had left a void in her life impossible to fill. To such a degree that everybody said that it would not be long before Pia Octavia would follow him to the grave. Seeking some consolation in her grief, she began to go down into the stable and there in the presence of the astonished Joselin, the *Chelu*, she would surrender to her passion and madness, weeping, embracing, fondling, and kissing in the wildest manner the heads of Dante and Petrarca, the favorite horses of her departed Cioretti. They were the living relics of her spouse so prematurely taken away, and Pia Octavia, in the madness of her love and grief, imagined they could feel her sorrow as she did herself. Time only seemed to increase her sorrow. Each day her extravagance with the horses increased, until Joselin, whose nerves

and cloudy mind had grown on edge, thought to intervene to lend some consolation with kind words and whatever attention he might think of. Joselin was clever and insinuating. He strove with such delicacy and shrewdness as to win the heart of Pia Octavia back to ways of peace, to such a point that in her gratitude she took the youth out of the stable and gave him enough money to set up in business as a wine-vender, which had always been his ideal. The neighbors of Pilares were not slow to note the liberality of the widow and he had hardly opened up his shop before they had invented a new nickname to take the place of his old one of "*the Chelu.*" Thenceforth he was known as Joselin "the Golden Lapdog."

The Golden Lapdog, finding himself owner of a large establishment, painted his entrance in scarlet and lost his head entirely. He fell into gluttony and licentious ways in company with disorderly men and women, and misconducted himself, generally and to such a degree, that on the eve of complications with the courts, he was obliged to seek the aid of the widow.

"Impossible, Joselin," the embarrassed madame replied to him. "You were faithful

and kind to me, and in memory of your old master, I think I treated you generously. You know you have spent a great deal of money. Now you ask me for more. Impossible, my boy, impossible. Nothing. Nothing."

That very night the Golden Lapdog committed suicide. This occurred two years after the widowhood of the lady. A few days after the suicide she left Pilares and took refuge in Cenciella to escape the bitter tongues of her neighbors. It was a house that Antonino had bought cheaply from some aristocratic old maids fallen into want. She thereupon put off her mourning dress and at home delighted in arraying herself in waists and gowns of bright colors or shimmering delicate combinations. Albert in the adjoining garden devoted himself to painting. The widow slyly regarded the youth between the screen of the orchards and approving his good looks, his simple refined air, began to plot and plan how she might come to know him. She had a little terrace arranged on their boundary walls and would go out on it in the cool of the evening just as the stars were appearing in the sky. At first Albert paid no attention to this, but the widow was determined to establish relations and to arrange a meeting.

At last one evening as he passed near by she spoke to him, between blushes and simpers:

“Young man! Ah, excuse me. What boldness! I addressed you unintentionally in my distraction——”

The widow enveloped in pale blue *tulle* leaned over from above where Albert was half hidden by the lattices of his peach trees.

“At your service, Señora,” he answered, approaching the spot with easy grace.

“You will say that I am crazy.” She hid her face in her hands. “Really, you excuse me?”

“But for what? If it is for having addressed me, I should rather thank you.”

“That is very amiable. Your garden is very pretty and well-cared for. It looks very fine from this height. Not only the garden, but the trees; as well. You seem to have plenty of flowers.”

“They are yours to command——”

“Not that, you will have need of them elsewhere.”

“What a notion!” Albert laughed freely. “Now you must pardon my own involuntary exclamation.”

“I should rather have you treat me frankly;

at any rate we are neighbors. You are alone, so they tell me. I, also, alone; have you thought how bored poor Pia Octavia may be?"

"No, no, don't say that. But what was it you wished to say to me at first?"

"You are going to laugh. But—I adore radishes. Those plants are radishes, aren't they?"

"I shall ask Celedonio."

"They are—I know them perfectly—take one by the stem and you will pull up the radish—no, not that way, stupid; you will break the stem. See, there you have broken it. I shall go down in the garden, that is, if you will permit me?"

"Come, jump down."

"No, no; in two minutes I shall be there." She disappeared behind the wall and shortly was beside Albert plucking the radishes from the earth. The night had fallen and thenceforward the widow managed to meet the youth. From this first evening affair there arose a friendship which grew to intimacy. Albert was unable to put into his attentions more than the light passion of a summer flirtation. The warm weather over, their relations were defi-

nitely broken and he thought no more of Pia Octavia, her brilliant waists and metallic shoes.

Now amid his crisis of spirit, hemmed in by the thoughts that oppressed him, he could not avoid seeing that the widow was waiting for him every evening on her terrace. One evening he went out to sit under the arbor. The widow, as soon as she saw him, began to make sounds to call him and he was forced to approach her.

"Ungrateful boy, is this the way you treat your friends? It is almost a year since we met."

Albert desired to make some explanation, but the widow anticipated him.

"No excuses, please. I know that you intend to marry. When, when will the day occur?"

"To marry?"

"To marry, yes. One would say the idea surprised you?"

Albert pulled himself together and cutting the conversation as short as he could he entered the house. His breast was filled with shame, His cheeks flushed at the thought. His belovéd—poor Fina!

He rang the bell and told Manolo to have his valise ready with a horse for him to ride

to Villaclara. Next morning as he mounted in the little court surrounded with its ring of royal poplars, he heard a whining in the balconies. Azor and Sultan were sticking their noses between the bars endeavoring to get down.

"Hush, Sultan; hush, Azor. I will be back shortly." And he rode off with an amiable wave of the hand.

VII

As the horse trotted along monotonously Albert was able to gather his thoughts, to place and know himself. His conscience relieved, he began to sing, distractedly accommodating his rhythm to the trot of the horse until he was surprised to find himself living and singing so nonchalantly. He realized, in a way amid his cloudy spiritual vapors, that in his soul were springing up new germs of ideas and moral norms of a fresh life of serenity and balance.

The day was calm, soft, and the country beautiful as though enameled by the recent rains. The breath of the humid earth met his nostrils mingled with the profuse scents of

flowers, the honey-suckle heavy through it all. Albert dismounted and plucked some sprays of the honeysuckle for his buttonhole. The green stretch of the meadows, dappled with red of the grazing cattle, at times forced him to stop in the sudden emotion of their color, allaying all disquietude, in the way a liquor from a broken bowl would spread over a smooth surface. Recovering himself, he understood in a flash, without any theorizing, the infinite egoistic delight of solitude in the heart of a hermit.

He took his luncheon in a tavern on a rise of the heights of Palomo and ordered only salad and fruit as his dessert. The tavern-keeper was sure he was a crazy man. After eating he climbed up among some fragrant pinetrees. From the heights he beheld a valley through which went wandering the river from Villa-clara; its banks ornamented with country-places like flowers of red and white, more and more numerous as one neared the sea. In this season the river was gray and shining like mercury; the sea, green and polished showing some sails unfurled, lay off the mouth of the river.

"Poor Fina," Albert murmured, as he sud-

denly came back to himself. Did he love his fiancée or not? The image of his belovéd, the quality of meekness and silence in her fair chaste body, had deserted his heart and mind for some time; but suddenly the possession of her spread over his soul in such a way as to create the illusion of a flame of ether and ascending force. He began to find his throat softening into sighs, half remorseful, half of tenderness.

Poor Fina!

VIII

Don Medardo Tramontana was reputed one of Pilares' most solid capitalists. An emigrant to Cuba in his early youth, he had met with the best of fortune, so that at the age of thirty-five he had come back to Spain bringing with him some two millions of pesetas, but having grown extremely emaciated, which was all the more remarkable on account of his unusual height. At Santiago de Cuba he had left behind his liver-complaint as well as the largest part of his adipose tissue, but he came back loaded with illusions, reading aloud with bad

prosody, and speaking in proverbs with the same fullness as when he had gone away. First of all, he helped out his poverty-stricken relatives, country people of the interior. Then he established himself at Pilares and put into the marriage-market his thin, yellow aquiline face, tinted like the gold of which he was possessed. When he was between forty and fifty the damsels of Pilares all sighed for possession of his money. Don Medardo made his selection with discretion and at last chose Lolita Muslera to be his very own, with her advantage of being seventeen years younger, her good looks, and excellent moral standing. The results of the marriage were moderate—two daughters, or *scions* as Don Medardo called them, were all their offspring. Leonor the elder was, from childhood, lively, graceful, and pretty. Josefina, on the other hand, was silent, meditative, and reserved in general. The parents loved Leonor and were proud of her beauty which, in fact, was merely a pretty face. Josefina was ordinarily considered the ugly sister, but the classic serenity of her lines, the peacefulness of her large eyes, her gently smiling lips and the entire deportment of her body were harmonized

into a beauty impossible to consider without reverence and delight. Moreover, Josefina had an adherent in the house: her Aunt Anastasia, sister of Don Medardo's mother, and a woman of force and candor. Leonor did not care to be seen on the streets with Aunt Anastasia, as the latter had never lost her country ways. With Josefina, however, the old woman was favorite company, and it was rare that they were seen apart.

Don Medardo had met Albert at the Merchant's Club in the "criminal's chamber" as they nicknamed the card-room. Don Medardo went there for distraction. The sum of ten pesetas, which was his daily risk, took infinite turns on the table and caused him hours of relief from his worries. From the very first, Don Medardo felt for Albert a sort of sympathy and respect. Albert did not make jokes at him as the other players did, and was undoubtedly a gentleman of education and breeding; and with these words Don Medardo said everything. One day, therefore, he made bold to invite Albert to come to dinner at his house, adding that Doña Dolores and his daughters would also be delighted. Albert accepted and at the table conducted himself

so gracefully and modestly that the entire family was captivated. That night when Doña Dolores was doing up her hair preparatory to retiring, she said:

“What a day, Medardo!”

“Keep still, or I shall not be able to sleep.”

“Well then, what is it?”

“What do you think of Albert?”

“You have asked me that question a dozen times; my answer is always—‘very nice indeed.’”

“What would you say if he were to ask for Leonor? A youth of such breeding!”

“Don’t be stupid. Not that she does not deserve that and better.”

“I know it; that’s why I say it. Seeing that it—but come, good night, *mulata*.”

Now it was evident that Doña Dolores was no *mulata*, but that was the tenderest name that Don Medardo, returned from Cuba, could give her as, bending to her, he kissed her forehead, high, round and smooth, unlined by any anxious thoughts.

On the same night Aunt Anastasia asked Josefina:

“What do you think of the young rascal, little one?”

“What young rascal, Aunt?”

“Who could I mean? Our guest of to-day.”

“Well, I hardly know——”

“Oh, you little dove!” exclaimed the old woman embracing her niece vigorously. From that time on Albert was frequently at the house; his visits became so regular and lengthy that Don Medardo, showing his satisfaction in his eyes and smiles, thought it timely to ask his daughter Leonor, as he tapped her cheek:

“How are affairs? No concealment from papa. Have you come to an understanding? Little rascal, tell me.”

“But, papa, whom are you speaking of?”

“Who, but you and Albert?”

“Do not dream of such a thing. Where could you have got so wild an idea?” Don Medardo rubbed his head.

“Well then,” he objected, “to whom is he paying his attentions?”

“All I know, papa, is that he comes to amuse himself.”

“But I have heard him talking very intimately with you.”

“Yes, after the first few times he became very friendly with Josefina and me. Also with Aunt Anastasia. Some fine day he will address

both you and mama in the same manner. You say he is a fine fellow and I don't doubt it; he has talent; nevertheless, he cannot dance the *rigadoon*, nor recite the poems of Pérez Zuñiga nor play forfeits. Then there are whole evenings when he hardly opens his mouth." Don Medardo endeavored to excuse his idol:

"That is surely the fault of Josefina who is certainly a kill-joy. The young man is, as you see, prohibited." Don Medardo intended to say *inhibited*.

True enough the "kill-joy" was the cause of Albert's silence as well as of his daily visits. He had begun to feel a secret attraction in the house of the returned Cuban. He came back again and again without knowing exactly why, as though something mechanical in his spirit led him to feel that there alone he should find the balance that he craved. At the beginning he appeared talkative and witty, pursuing amiable lines and desiring the affection of all. He treated Josefina as though she were a child, since in spite of her twenty years she retained many traces of adolescence as well in her natural ingenuousness and as in the attitude the rest of the family took toward her. But little by little Albert realized that within this

childish breast there hid a treasure profound and precious. He regretted his frivolous words and the clever foolishness he had emitted and began to entertain the dream of possessing the soul of Josefina. He thought of her constantly. Alone he measured his words and prepared careful phrases full of the passion that was soon to be declared; in her company he despaired at the infinite distance he felt from the white purity of Josefina's heart. He avoided conversation, thinking that perhaps silence was the one approach to the affection of his choice. One evening he surprised a look in the eyes of Josefina which left no doubt regarding the nature of her sentiment for him. Finding that her secret was discovered, she did not drop her eyes nor blush, but continued gazing fixedly and tenderly upon him. Albert was on the point of falling at her feet to adore her in the presence of all. He restrained his wild desire until he could find a moment alone with Josefina, his eyes melting as he said:

"Then it is true that you love me?"

"Yes," she said in a low voice.

"Since when?"

"From the beginning—and forever."

And they gazed into each other's eyes as if

love had immortalized them and transformed them into statues.

Their love affair soon became noticeable. Aunt Anastasia considered it as her own triumph. Don Medardo was not so sure: it was contrary to his ideas; it wounded him that Leonor had been overlooked. On the other hand, he could not understand what Albert saw in Josefina to make him love her, and he doubted the young man's sincerity.

"Isn't it ridiculous, Dolores?" he asked of his wife.

"Who can say, Medardo? Men are so different. What was there in me that you should have sought me?"

"No comparisons, woman; if only Fina could look like you at her age!" Then with sudden heat—"Or even now, *mulata*," he added squeezing her beefy arm.

"Come, Medardo, don't be rude. They appear to be in love, at any rate——"

"Yes, but there is this question. Does it look right that the elder, the prettier, and more attractive sister is without a fiancé? It must not be."

"You know she has many proposals."

"If you call that puppy Hurtado a suitor——"

"She herself does not seem displeased with him."

Leonor had become infatuated with Telesforo. He plumed himself on this and resolved to profit by it to the utmost. On his side he had bribed one of the maid servants to carry the damsel every day a note and a poetical composition. His verses were full of sounding phrases and melodious rubbish, but they acted on Leonor's nerves making her breathe heavily with her hand pressed to her heart. The slow poisoning of this poetry manifested itself finally in alarming perturbations. The unfortunate belovéd lost her appetite, forgot her smiles, her art of embroidering slippers, and indulged extravagantly in spells and fainting fits. These delivered such rude shocks to Don Medardo's stubbornness that at last he was forced to capitulate and leave the way open to Telesforo to reach the goal of his desire. Not content with that Telesforo determined to win the sympathies of her parents. On the other hand, Albert, as time passed on, showed such peculiarities and indifferences that Don

Medardo and his wife began to entertain doubt as to his sanity. He was just as quick in leaving the house as though he had quarrelled with Fina; and he came back again without any prior announcement, as though nothing had happened, or as if his fiancée were something over which he held an unquestionable right. On this account Doña Dolores used to murmur:

“God grant that your bringing this man to our house will not cost us dearly, Medardo.”

IX

It was a few minutes before luncheon that Don Medardo and his wife, with Hurtado and Leonor, were seated in the garden. Fina was cutting some flowers for the table, far enough away not to be able to hear their conversation. Don Medardo stiffened in a wicker chair and blurted out:

“But, can you believe, Hurtado, that this—this criminal—what shall I call him—Do you believe it is he?”

The face of Don Medardo looked like a corpse's.

"Papa, dear papa, don't take on so."

"Keep still, Leonor," answered her father.

"As I told you on the day after the mystery, I was in his house. It was entirely in ruins."

"Evident sign of a bloody battle"—those were the words of the newspaper," added Doña Dolores.

"But he himself," continued Hurtado drawing down the ends of his mustache, "was entirely composed. He took his bath before me and anointed himself with a toilet-water that cost him fourteen pesetas a bottle."

"Monstrous!" cried Don Medardo lifting his hands to heaven with the newspaper shaken out nervously. He looked like a demented prophet worn out by fastings and mortifications.

"Come, papa, don't grow excited without cause. Albert may be all that you indicate, and you see very well that he is no idol of mine nor I of him; but this appears too strange, too impossible."

"Impossible, no," insisted Hurtado.

"Do you wish to make him out guilty, Telesforo?"

"Impossible?" as Don Medardo shook his head thoughtfully. "Do you know what a

delirium is, a *lavabus* as these young men call it among themselves at the club?"

"How could she know about it, Medardo?"

"She might hear about it, woman. Well, daughter, when they swallow one of these potions, they are turned into a sort of demon. One night they broke all the mirrors of the Club and, mind you, there were some tall ones that cost a fortune; then they dragged all the furniture of the yellow room into the street, stoves and everything—why they did not start a conflagration was a divine miracle; then they peeled off their clothes——"

"A pretty picture," suggested Leonor, starting to laugh and provoking a frown from her lover. Doña Dolores observingly intervened:

"What are you saying, Leonor? And you, Medardo, you are too nervous to continue. Let us change the conversation as Fina is coming."

"For all that," whispered Don Medardo in his heavy voice at her ear, "you must tell the youngster during luncheon that she is to put this chap out of her thoughts."

"Well, as you are head of the house, you can tell her yourself."

Josefina came up and sat upon a bench.

"Have you put the flowers on the table?"

Josefina nodded. Telesforo in a roundabout way suggested that it was about time to eat, which the others seemed to be forgetting. They went into the dining-room gloomily as though they were about to perform a rite of cannibalism. The luncheon was brought on with funereal solemnity. Every time Huertado would start a light topic his best endeavor failed. The slight appetites of the Tramontana family prevented him from eating his fill. Don Medardo passed by the omelette with disdain; the others hardly touched it, so that it reached him almost in its pristine proportions. Hurtado gazed on it with amorous eyes of desire; but the shame of committing himself before the party withheld him. Aunt Anastasia, who knew everybody's secret and whose strong imagination pictured Albert already chained in some underground dungeon, was undergoing mortal agonies and had all she could do to control herself from breaking out into sobs. Her heart was burning within her. Josefina gazed obliviously from one to the other. She knew that something had happened, but felt no desire to make inquiries.

A duck and turnips appeared on the table and Don Medardo recovered some of his lost energy.

"Difficult situations should be met promptly," he said. His voice was uncertain and sounded deep. He looked at the duck and the turnips with the earnestness of desperation. Doña Dolores and Hurtado looked fixedly at the mantelpiece. Aunt Anastasia bit her lips to restrain her tears. Leonor watched her father and Josefina saw it all, without suspecting that she was the cause.

"Josefina, my child——"

Somewhat astonished she turned to her father who was taking a sip of Vichy.

"I have something to say to you which breaks my heart." Josefina's face, ordinarily of olive smoothness, became paler. "Your association with Albert has come to an end forever."

Josefina, silent and impassive, waited for more. Don Medardo hesitated and Leonor intervened:

"Do not be troubled, papa wishes to say——"

Don Medardo interrupting continued:

"I wish to say that everything is over forever——"

“Do you hear? Do you hear?”

“Yes,” she answered. “But what else?”

“Eh?” asked Don Medardo half stupified, half concerned.

And Josefina in the same even tone:

“Has he died, or—has he married?”

“Worse, worse; do not ask, my darling child,” and he hid his face in his hands.

It was then that Aunt Anastasia let forth a wild cry; Doña Dolores, leaned over her husband fearing he might have a sudden attack; Leonor turned to assist her mother; Hurtado was constrained to drop the leg of the duck and his half-dozen turnips to hurry to the aid of his fiancée; while Josefina amid it all maintained her air of goddess-like impassivity. Don Medardo became ill. Escorted by Doña Dolores, Leonor, and Hurtado he was led to his bed. Josefina and Aunt Anastasia were alone in the dining-room. Josefina threw a look of inquiry on her old companion who proceeded to tell her everything, ending with sighs that seemed half-smiles,

“Who would have said it, really, my love?”

“But is he in prison, Auntie? Is anything known for certain?”

“Nothing, but where else should he be?”

A tear stole down Josefina's waxen cheek.

"How we make you suffer, dear! Only for a moment, then you will forget him and hate him."

"What are you saying, Aunt Anastasia? You say this to me? now when I love him more than ever because he is in pain and perhaps grieving. To be parted from him? You don't understand, Aunt Anastasia; you are too good and you do not know what it is to be in love."

Aunt Anastasia was plainly puzzled for an instant; then weeping, she threw her arms around Josefina.

"What you say is true, dear. Lord! Lord! —but we are hurting you!"

Josefina allowed her to kiss her, then drew herself from her arms.

"Let me go and see how Papa is."

From the bedroom door she whispered to Leonor:

"Is he very ill?"

"It is nothing. For heaven's sake, why stand there? Come in."

"I might bother him."

"Come, don't be so foolish. What fault is it of yours? Has Auntie told you?"

“Of what?”

“About Albert.”

“Yes, everything.”

“As far as I am concerned, even if they told it to me in church, I should not believe it. It seems impossible to me; what do you say?”

“Even if it were true——”

Leonor opened her eyes and stared exclaiming:

“You are losing your wits, child; there is something wrong with you——”

“Wouldn’t you feel the same way?”

“In such a case? Come, hush with this crazy talk. Let us go to Papa.”

Don Medardo was taking a soothing drink that Telesforo was holding before him. He motioned to Josefina and took her by the waist.

“Poor little girl, how I grieve for you!”

“Be calm, Papa, and don’t upset yourself on my account.” She stroked down some of the sparse and disordered locks of her protector.

“What if we went into the garden? The air will do him good,” suggested Telesforo. In his mind came the echoed thought: “If they go into the garden I shall be able to finish my luncheon in peace, with the grace of God.”

“Yes, Medardo,” Telesforo spoke as

solemnly as a book. "Come into the garden" and he aided him in that direction.

The family sat down under the shady arbor behind the house and Hurtado slyly stole back again into the dining room.

At three o'clock Telesforo had certain duties to take him into Villaclara; Don Medardo, Doña Dolores, Leonor, and Aunt Anastasia retired for *siesta*. Josefina remained in the garden arranging the flowers and shrubs. She led Sirena, the family cow, out to a neighboring meadow where there was some juicy pasture. Then she came back to the bee-hives ranged in a line near the pigeon-house. Through the garden there ran a stream near by, along whose banks were great masses of daisies, narcissus, roses, and carnations. She picked out a shady spot on the grass where she might see her flowers. Her eyes wandered over the tops of the dark poplars that shed their mighty shadows as protection to the house. A band of linnets fluttered around the topmost branches, in one continuous song sustained as by magic in the upper air. Josefina, in enchantment, raised her head and stretched back her neck as if to receive the communion of its beauty. The clear ripple of the stream caressed the ear, and

the heavy odor of so many roses left her panting with open lips. The bees approached her, settled on her arms, her face, and breast; they all knew her well. When they rose before her in a spellbound circle, she turned to them and began to recite in a singing, murmurous voice:

O little bees of the Virgin,
And O little bees of the Lord,
Bring from the flower I worship
The honey my heart has stored.
Bees that are making the white wax,
Bees that are making the sweet,
Seek not narcissus, nor lily,
Nor rose, nor carnation's retreat.
Nor flower that blooms on the water,
Nor flower of rock or of sky,
Nor even the honeysuckle
That twines on the walls hardby.
I would make of your wax for the Virgin
A taper to burn at her shrine;
She will show you the flower I worship,
Little bees, let its honey be mine.
Little bees, little bees of Saint Anna,
Seek the blooms of the fig-trees of yore
As in sunshiny mornings forever
To gather your treasures in store;
Little bees, where Saint Joachim leads you,
Where heaven his daughter reveals,
O bring from the Virgin's high garden
The sweet of the flower that heals!

And the little bees, as if intoxicated with the maiden's voice, began to dance in the air and bumble musically.

The evening coming on, the family descended again into the garden. Telesforo had arrived from Villaclara. Doña Dolores and Hurtado were trying to convince the head of the house of the hygienic and salutary results of a trip to the beach of Salsero and its pine-heights. Don Medardo refused every suggestion to budge.

"Don't waste time talking of it. My legs are no good nowadays," and he pointed at the wiry skeleton that showed through his loose and baggy trousers.

A sudden outcry came from all.

Albert was seen opening the red wicket gate and in all seriousness entering the front garden.

X

As usual Albert had left his horse at the inn of Pino, two kilometers outside of Villa-clara. From there he had come on foot through the lanes and bypaths. He descended a sandy bank and cut across meadows over a deep streamlet of amber waters where the red light of the afternoon was gathering. His bridge was the black trunk of a dead tree.

Apple orchards in full fruitage lay on either side. From a height he caught a view of the ruddy gables of Josefina's house, the golden-brown barns, the hooded pigeon-house and the dark waving of the old poplars. His heart beat audibly. For a moment he stood undecided, then he started to run down the hill. He rested beside a broken wall; then passed through an opening and came along the garden wall to the gates. Over the wall a view of the garden showed the bee-hives lined beside the pigeon-house; the banks of narcissus and daisies, roses and carnations stretching along the stream running around the house and coming toward Albert's feet. Some rocks served as a crossway over the waters. He could now hear the sounds of conversation among the trees and from time to time caught sight of a sunlit opening.

As he reached the red gate and opened his way into the garden, he was met by a mingled cry of many voices. At the end of the avenue sat Don Medardo in his wicker chair and around him were grouped Doña Dolores, Leonor, and Hurtado. Don Medardo was waving his arms and making unintelligible sounds. Doña Dolores and Leonor turned and retired, the mother's voice being heard to say:

"Josefina, Josefina, go into the house instantly!"

Albert quickened his steps.

"What has happened," he asked, as he held out his hand to Don Medardo who refused to take it.

"Will you please explain?" Albert continued somewhat taken-back.

Hurtado, his head held down, endeavored to explain:

"You see, Guzmán. It has happened——"

"It has happened," said Don Medardo, resuming his place as head of his house, "that I cannot understand how you can dare to enter this honest household." He tried in vain to arrange a striking phrase full of recrimination and sonority. Albert racked his brains trying to find reasons for the profound displeasure visible in Don Medardo. Could it be on account of the neglect he had shown poor Josefina?

"Let us have an understanding, Don Medardo. I can hardly understand this reception. I acknowledge my inattentions, a serious matter if you interpret it that way. But as you see that I have returned, you might imply that I desire to apologize."

"Ah," growled Don Medardo. "What would you say to that Telesforo?" and without waiting for the latter's reply he turned on Albert: "And do you think you should dishonor us by presenting yourself here with your hands dripping with blood; I say, with your hands red with blood?"

Albert broke out into a loud laugh.

"What are you laughing at? At my indignation? We cannot always be dignified. At any rate the main point is——"

"That I am an assassin. Pardon me if I have been slow in apprehending. Just before I left Pilares, this rumor was brought me by a friend. The supposition was so preposterous that I thought everybody would laugh at it, as I did. I have not thought of it since. Now I see that it has spread around and it bothers me to realize that people could be so stupid . . . so childish as to accept such twaddle."

"Then, you deny it?"

"Please, Don Medardo, don't continue with this ridiculous talk."

"Well, then explain yourself."

"I wish to say that you have been stupid enough to offend me, and to call it stupidity

is to put it very lightly. All I ask is that those who have been so senseless as to accept this rumor should forget it at once."

Don Medardo rose to his feet and scrutinized Albert's eyes very sharply.

"But, declare that it is untrue."

"Surely; no more of this," snapped Albert at the end of his patience, clinching his hands and preparing to depart.

"My son," blurted Don Medardo, throwing himself on Albert and starting to weep.

"As if I did not refuse to credit this, refuse to believe it——"

"Also, remember that I insisted that it was impossible," put in Telesforo.

"The first one that contradicted it was Leonor; let the truth be told. You see how clever she is."

"And Josefina?"

"As usual, Albert, she made no remark. And now let us not forget our business."

"Have you seen the newspapers recently? No? Well then it appears that an investigation of your house has revealed things strangely prejudicial to you. What you will please do immediately to-morrow, is to present yourself before the judge in Pilares and cor-

rect this entire mistake. This will prove your innocence. Will you go?"

"Most certainly."

Don Medardo then called out:

"Lola, Leonor, Fina, Anastasia. Come down, come down quickly."

Doña Dolores, Leonor, and the old aunt appeared in a moment. Josefina came a little later, simple and unaffected as ever.

Don Medardo, wiping his eyes, kept repeating:

"Didn't I tell you it couldn't be true?"

"And I too, Leonor," added Telesforo.

"And I said it myself."

"We have had a great upset over you: that is true; yes, a great upset," sighed Doña Dolores.

Aunt Anastasia kept still and doleful.

"And you, what did you say," and Albert pressed his fiancée's hand. "Did you imagine that you were engaged to another Ravachol?"

Josefina did not answer; she merely dropped her eyes and returned the pressure of his hands.

"How tame you are, daughter," said Doña Dolores. Then Don Medardo remarked:

"Let her alone; she has passed through

quite enough for to-day. Well at last peace reigns in Cracovia."

"And now," began Telesforo, "as Don Medardo says, as 'peace reigns in Cracovia—'"

"Wherever that may be, Telesforo; or have I made a mistake?"

"Of course you have, man; it is in Varsovia you mean," declared Aunt Anastasia, firmly.

"Well, at any rate, it seems a pleasant moment for us to start for that outing on the beach among the pines. What would you say to that?"

Don Medardo affected a coyness, but between coaxing and petting he consented to go. They all started out except Aunt Anastasia who remained behind to make the butter. First went Josefina and Albert; then Leonor with Hurtado, followed by Don Medardo and his helpmate.

Albert and Josefina found little to say.

"How happy I am!" he whispered her.

Josefina's eyes told her he was speaking the truth.

"And you, Fina?"

"Why should you ask me?"

"To be sure, Fina."

After another pause:

"Do you forgive me, Fina?"

"For what."

"Because I have not behaved very well towards you: I write so seldom; you do not hear from me."

"Hush, do not mention it."

"But I love you, I love you. If you could only know! "And he felt himself swept by a tide of emotion. Josefina turned her eyes and smiled on him.

"How foolish you are!"

She plucked some honeysuckle sprays from the vine and offered them to him in exchange for the faded ones in his buttonhole.

"Take these fresh ones for the old ones. You see yours have no perfume left," she said as she fastened them on.

The heads of the house selected a high point among the pines where they sat down and watched the two engaged couples walking on the beach. Josefina and Albert went out to the water's edge. The tide was coming in, the waves ceaselessly piling on high, rising and falling, advancing and retreating and spreading and melting into the sands at their feet.

"Every third wave is a big one. Let us count them," proposed Josefina.

They began to count. Sometimes they had to run back to escape one that was particularly threatening.

"The rule does not appear to be scientific, Fina. That third wave is sometimes lacking."

"Perhaps our counting is at fault."

They tried again.

"That time it was all right."

"Do you think so?"

"Come, let us sit down." They went back where the sand was thoroughly dry.

Josefina sat down; Albert threw himself on the sand, his elbows supporting his chin as he feasted his eyes on her.

"Are you going to tell me the truth?"

"I always tell you the truth, Albert."

"When they were saying these ridiculous things about me, what did you think?"

After some minutes of retrospect Josefina replied:

"It was Aunt Anastasia told me. As she is so good, everything that is unhappy seems exaggerated in her imagination. She told me you were in prison. I had a great desire to weep, but I could not. I thought of you there

alone and that I could not go to you gave me great suffering."

"Could you believe me capable of such a thing?"

"I didn't stop to think of that. I know nothing of such a world. When I hear of the evil deeds of some people, I don't think about the evil of them. If they do such things it must be because of something stronger than | themselves. Nobody seems to me to do wrong through desire of it. They told me about you as if it were certain. I was not intending to question it simply because you had done it. All I thought of was how you must suffer. Why do I speak about it, as I know nothing about it? One thing I know—and it is my secret, my sole secret—" and she bowed her head—"you will say what a witch Josefina is becoming!"

Albert did not answer. He looked long and tenderly at his belovéd. His brows doubled up darkly with the frown of some tragic mask; some recognition, it seemed, of a grief to which he could not respond. His heart seemed to gather up a tide of bitter-sweet, of joys, and of sorrows.

"Don't look at me in that way, Albert."

"Alas, Josefina, why have I ever known you. I am afraid I do not deserve you; I am afraid to make you unhappy."

"Do not say so. Without you I should not wish to live. See, if you had not loved me I should have entered the convent. I thought of it often, as Aunt Anastasia knows well. But since I love you everything is different. To love you, that is everything. How should you make me unhappy?"

"How do I know? Because I am I; because I am always so unhappy and I fear to speak of my ideas to you lest they might soil you. Beside you I forget them all, all; but when I leave you I am a thing without will or resolution, at the mercy of strange powers."

The heavens were now purple. The sea was spread with trembling light and violet. On the brows of the two lovers shone down the great orb of the night.

In Albert, feeling was lyrical. His temperament exaggerated the present and inclined him to overflowing phrases and to flood his emotions with picturesque images. At the same time he entertained a decided aversion to wordiness and empty rhetoric, and

he put a barrier of precise and dry expressions against the vehement overflowing of his heart. When sentiment was in control of his spirit, he could speak in a style as bare as his hand so that only in his eyes did he betray the disorder that reigned within him. On occasions, however, he was not able to observe this restrained manner, and then the muscles of his face, little adapted to mobility, showed an expressive contraction, in a sort of mimic elocution sometimes comic, sometimes sympathetic or doleful.

“I am always sure of myself, Albert.”

Albert had drawn himself up on his knees, his hands against his thighs, absorbed, with a great thirst in his eyes exchanging a long gaze with those of his belovéd; as in two mirrors held against each other, the reciprocity of their visions was lost in horizons of infinite ecstacy.

“Fina, Albert, it is growing late,” called Doña Dolores.

They turned back toward the house. Night had fallen; the girls were singing around the fountain-place. The cows were coming into the sheds to the sounds of their bells. Leonor and Hurtado talked away without stopping, planning for their wedding. Fina and Albert, walking on ahead, felt the supreme delight of

each other's presence without a word or even a glance. As they turned a corner that hid them from the others, Albert took Josefina by the hand; his breath failed him, he closed his eyes:

"Take me as I am, Ariadne, through the labyrinth of life. I am blind, oh, be my guide."

"Then open your eyes, dear one, and look upon the stars."

There were tears in Albert's eyes as he looked up at the sky.

"Do you see the star that is my greatest delight?"

Albert searched the heavens to find the chosen star of Fina's heart.

"It is Sirius."

"The blue one, that trembles ceaselessly."

When they reached the house, Don Medardo declared that the walk had been delightful. All appeared happy. Albert and Hurtado were invited for supper. Telesforo petted his fiancée extravagantly, swallowing everything with watchful gluttony, Leonor lending herself to his appetite with offerings of delicious morsels. Fina's cheeks were flushed with a delicate color and Albert was

lost in a mute adoration. Don Medardo and Doña Dolores exchanged glances of intelligence, that indicated their anticipation of a bright future. From the table they adjourned to the conservatory for their coffee.

“Open a window,” said Don Medardo.

“Don’t be childish, Medardo; there is dampness in the air and we shall soon have the night-chills.”

“It is a very mild evening, Dolores, and I have told you the walk has left me feeling fine.”

He wished to hear the music of some hidden farmhand who every night about this hour played the country tunes on his flute. As usual the music was there and all listened with a sentimental pleasure.

“Let us put out the lamp; there is a moon,” observed Albert. Josefina turned off the light, as through the window floated the melody of the flute, the perfume of the flowers, and the murmur of the doves. All the conservatory was flooded with the green phosphorescence of the moonlight.

“How poetical!” whispered Hurtado. Then in lower voice to Leonor: “I shall compose a poem on this exquisite moment.”

The flute grew silent and Don Medardo rose, saying:

"It is growing late for me, so I shall retire. My advice is to you Albert, that you get out early to-morrow morning and hurry into Pilares, and settle the matter at once."

"That is true. I had not considered that."

"Then let us all retire at once," suggested Doña Dolores.

Albert could not find his hat. They looked for it in vain throughout the house.

"It might be in the jasmine bower. We passed through there in coming from the beach. You may have put it down as we passed."

Josefina hurried out and Albert followed, calling:

"Don't bother, Josefina. I can go alone."

They met in the bower, they alone.

Albert took both her hands against his breast then put them to his lips. Amid the fragrance of the jasmine, Fina's eyes were aglow. His hands ran along her arms to the elbow and he drew her towards him delicately and firmly. Their bodies drew together with enervating warmth. Their breaths were mingled and by a silent and mutual accord

their lips met in a long sweet kiss. Albert, amid the spiritual transport and abandon, felt the physical delight of Fina's fresh, warm, chaste lips.

"It wasn't there?" asked Leonor as they came back without the hat.

"Nowhere. I shall borrow your cap, Hurtado."

As a matter of fact the hat was in the bower.

Hurtado and Albert started for the tramway into Villaclara. On the road they waved back to Leonor and Fina whose shadows could be seen against the yellow light of the window. They stood on the rear platform of the car as it sped along beside the quiet shining river, where the masts of the barks seemed like nets that fished for the starlight between their shadows.

"You have never been so much like yourself as to-day, Albert."

"What do you mean?"

"So enthusiastic, so—what shall I say? Undeceive yourself; at our age love is everything and its one solution is marriage. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what to think. Now con-

sider: you or I or another are in love with a woman of such and such a description—face, body, expression, accent, and so forth—which makes her different from all other women. If we love her intensely, all the others become indifferent or odious for us. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, yes; however, there are others for diversion, let us say, for passing the time."

"Pardon me, I am speaking of love—Love with a capital letter. As you used to say; the only love—I am referring to that exclusive sentiment which causes us to concentrate our actual life upon one woman in particular, without which there can be no licit, honorable marriage. Think then, if to-morrow on your return to Don Medardo's house there should come out to meet you a worn-out woman with fallen breast and toothless mouth and stretch out to you her loving arms, crying 'Telesforo my life, come to your Leonor.' If it, in fact, proved to be Leonor transfigured in the course of one night by some strange circumstance, by magic if you will, spiritually she would continue to be the Leonor of this afternoon. Would you love her as you loved to-day?"

"That is fantastic and impossible, I know

it cannot happen; I don't know what I should do if it did occur."

"It cannot occur? Why man, it most certainly does occur. I am condensing the work of a few years, a very few, into a single night. I leave aside all moral considerations, for instance, the deception that follows on a desire achieved, the numberless miseries that corrode our love, the result of intimacies. I omit all consideration of these points. I note only that the physical being of the woman you love must remain the same woman, although transformed into a creature entirely distinct and disagreeable; the same whether she grows fat or shrivels up."

"You seem to refer to a material love."

"You mean love of the flesh?"

"Yes, but love is something aside from materialism; it is a pure sentiment."

"From soul to soul?"

"Without doubt."

"Then marriage is a failure."

"That is just your talk; these are exaggerations."

"I have asked you to help me in my argument. When Plato discourses on the senti-

ment of love, from various points of view—”

“Plato? You are joking.”

“Yes, Plato.”

“But isn’t Plato, an artificial name, an invented type, like that beastly Heliogabalus who ate so much?”

“Pardon me, Telesforo. As a matter of fact I was speaking in joke and I thought you were following me.” Secretly he thought: I shall have no more serious talks with this dunce.

“Another thing, Guzmán. I have had very bad reports about the Meumiret firm. As soon as you can, take out your deposits. If you have the voucher which I can indorse with the name of my firm, that will be sufficient.”

“All right, as you desire it, and many thanks.”

“Of course, seeing you are my friend and Fina’s lover.”

They had reached the end of their journey.

XII

The tramway station occupied one corner of the Gardens of San Agustín, the public

park of Villaclara. A brass band of twelve bearded individuals nicknamed "The Twelve Apostles," each with an instrument of percussion harsh and Apocalyptic, blared incongruous noises from out a Japanese kiosk. A gigantic Limonnaire organ added to the rumpus and fanfare of the band.

Down the principal walk of the path under the arc-lights moved a circle of the young townswomen and summer visitors.

"Let us take a turn and see the pretty faces. What do you say, Albert? Then let us go to the cinematograph. I have a surprise for you."

"Don't let us walk."

"Then at once to the theater."

Albert gave in. The front of the place was dazzling. Terrible was the bellow of the organ and terrible the looks of the façade, with twisted columns that made one dizzy; intricate figures of gold, reds, blues, and yellows; and forms of shepherds affecting the steps of a dance. A woman in an enormous hat with enormous feathers, enormous solitaires in her ears, enormous eyebrows and enormous moustache, acted as ticket-seller, sitting very rigid behind a table covered with

scarlet velvet. On the right side of the entrance hung a large sheet of black oil-cloth with colossal letters, proclaiming:

**LA BELLA TOÑITA
LEADING STAR OF THE MUSIC
HALLS**

Then followed the announcement of the films.

Albert moved forward to get two reserved seats.

“Not at all,” objected Hurtado, speaking to the madame of the rich pendants and rich vegetation of hair. “Two general admissions,” and, turning to Albert, “You must see Antoñita from near by. She is a pretty little thing and a good friend of mine; I shall present you,” and he rolled his eyes in voluptuous pride.

They entered and joined a group of youths of the middle-class gathered to try out their poor jokes at the expense of the women seated in unenviable prominence in front. As soon as the hall became dark, the youths simulated the sounds of kisses from the backs of their hands with effeminate screams which always produced a laugh. For every turn of the

pictures they had some comment of double-meaning, vulgarity, and even obscenity. Albert was disgusted.

A pianist performed a *pasadoble* of the bull-ring, the youths acting as his chorus. The curtain went up showing the empty little stage. The patter of feet was heard, followed by a shout from the youths. Then a woman came out on the stage wrapped up like a bull-fighter in a Manila shawl of brilliant green and yellow. Under the long fringes falling like branches of willow, there showed her white skirt with spangles, as if it were some lily upside down. Stockings of white silk, and very transparent, revealed the pink skin beneath. Her slippers were of white brocade. Her slender right arm was raised above her head, and in her hand she carried an Andalusian *sombrero* of pale-blue felt. She turned her head to avoid the light, so that at first Albert could not make out whether or not she was pretty. Humoring the braggart music, she pattered her heels without stirring from the spot; then suddenly she began to show her grace in little steps, waving the *sombrero*, shaking her head, and winking her eyes. Her lack of sureness and pertness proved her

to be a beginner in the dancing line. A swollen flat face was stuck out of the wings, to count the audience, after which it turned to the dancer urging her in a rough voice—“*Anda niña.*” (“Start ahead!”) It was Bella Toñita’s mother.

When she had finished the *pasodoble*, Toñita threw her shawl and sombrero in a heap at her weird old mother’s feet, and shrugging her shoulders and smoothing her waist she came down to the footlights awkwardly, not knowing what to do with her hands. She seemed to be no more than sixteen years of age. Her white dress and spangles, as well as her undeveloped almost childish figure, added to the effect of her innocence. She tried to smile, but got no further than to grimace like some youngster caught in a forbidden act and trying to cover it up. She sang a low couplet; the youths accompanying the chorus with—

Cri, cri
Cri, cri, cri.

The respectable families took their departure and Toñita seemed to lose all her ease in being rid of them, but the horrible face of

her mother stuck out from the wings, urging her on: "Something stronger, something rougher!" She followed with three other verses as nasty and offensive as the first. Then the youths called for a tango. Toñita excused herself, but they would have no refusal and began to beat their palms and shriek like savages. She acceded and came out sideways, crossing her steps and waving her hips, her skirt held up on one side to her waist, balancing her hat on her head with her little finger. The youths threw their caps and flowers at her feet, crying mockingly, "Ah, my life! My heart's blood!" The dancer, warmed by the applause, lost all control and whirled in a vortex, as she beat her heels, waved her arms frantically and tried to roll her poor girlish stomach, and sprang and twisted until, at the end of the music, she fell on one knee raising her sombrero like a tenor taking an encore. Tremendous applause followed these muscular exercises.

Albert, while the girl was pretending to dance, studied the delicate lines of her leg, the slender ankles, and calves to which the white batiste clung with perspiration. She breathed a warm wave of heliotrope.

"What do you think of her?"

"She is a wonder."

"You are joking; the poor thing dances like a cat in a fit."

"I was speaking of her shape. I have never seen more classic grace. Shall we go now?"

"First we must go in to meet her. A good little girl. Alfonso del Marmol seems to be paying her attentions. He is free with his money, but the mother is a dragon. See, we are in the entry; let us call from here. Can we come in, Doña Consuelo?"

"Enter, gentlemen, and take a seat on this trunk. We have so little space here."

Doña Consuelo, swaying like a poplar under a hurricane on account of her lameness, took some garments out of the Saratoga trunk as Hurtado presented Albert in the little enclosure curtained in red percale. In a corner Alfonso del Marmol stood looking on. He had skinny legs, his arms crossed, his hips against the back of a chair, his head thrown back, and a great Havana between his teeth. His face was aquiline, large and dried up; the nose stuck out boldly, slightly reddened at the point; the beard was of ruddy hue; the complexion white as marble; the eyebrows high

and free; the eyes little and scornful, the lids loose and large and very much lined; they drooped over his eyes on account of the position of his head. He gave the impression of a caged eagle consumed by boredom, and inspired people with grave disquiet. On seeing Albert he rose and took him by the hand cordially.

"Have you come to see your belovéd?"

"Yes. And you?"

"For the horse races." Solemnly he took out of his inside pocket a golden cardcase and handed it to Albert. "The prize of the Count de Bongrado. There isn't an animal in the world to compare with my mare Nena," he said coldly, puffing forth his smoke as though he were speaking to himself without paying the slightest attention to the damsel or her mother whom he estimated as such and such an amount of money, nor to the oily Hurtado. Albert alone seemed worthy to estimate his success properly. Albert had always humored Marmol's infantile humors.

"Let me see, let me see," cried Toñita. She was in pantaloons and a red waist, showing the upper part of her breast. "Show me, show me," she said darting over to Alfonso. He had

sat down and with his face stretched toward the ceiling and an inattentive expression he held out his prize to her.

"Aren't you going to give it to me?"

Alfonso continued smoking, still holding out his hand.

"Is it gold?" asked Antoñita.

"Gold of the finest," Hurtado assured them.

"Come, Don Alfonso; please the little thing with it and you will see what return she will give you," begged Doña Consuelo, leaning on her good leg and shaking the other in her skirt like the clapper of a bell.

Albert interrupted:

"Say no more, Alfonso only waits the chance to give it to her."

"And if I give it," Marmol began to say while Antoñita hurried to stick it in her breast. "I give it on condition that I myself may place it where she desires to keep it."

"There is nothing slow about the gentleman," murmured Antoñita with an air of displeasure.

"The slow one is yourself. Come, Don Alfonso, you shall see that the girl is worth something to you."

Alfonso arose and with the careless solemnity

of a monk in the routine of his duty stuck the cardcase in the breast of Antoñita, who through instinct threw forward her arms to protect herself, her brows in a frown of displeasure. When Marmol had done, she sighed:

“You have been very good,” and she pulled him slyly by the beard.

“That’s enough, child; get your clothes on.”

The mouth, the eyes, the forehead of Antoñita, in spite of the bad teachings of her mother, were still chaste and innocent. On the other hand, certain features of her face brought suggestions of animals; the sensitiveness of her nostrils, the manner in which they joined her lips, and the smallness of her teeth gave her a surprising resemblance to a white rabbit. Her eyes round and shining had all the sweetness and timidity of a wild hare.

“When are you going to marry?” asked Marmol, biting at his cigar.

Albert knew that he was being questioned and answered:

“Do you advise me to marry?”

“Certainly.”

“Considering the vices——”

“If they desired to divorce me,” said Mar-

mol with his head thrown back and speaking in dull ordinary tone, "and they wished me to marry again, I should immediately marry my first wife. Few married folk can say the same. But your fiancée is like my Amparo; hear me now. All the other women put together are not worth these two."

Antoñita frowned a little at Marmol. He smiled bitterly.

"What are you smiling at?" asked Doña Consuelo.

"I am smiling at something else. When will they put you in prison?"

"In prison!" cried Antoñita dropping her lip-stick.

"Yes, in prison. I am referring to Albert," and he let forth a loud vulgar laugh.

"Come, now," Doña Consuelo dropped on her lame side and turned her eyes on him dubiously.

"I know why you are laughing," said Albert naturally.

"You do?"

"Certainly."

"Then whisper it to me. If you know I shall admit it," he answered smiling.

"I tell you that I know," he went over and spoke into Marmol's ear. "You know where Rosina is hiding. More than that; it is you that have hidden her."

Marmol went on smiling as though he had heard nothing.

The curtain was lifted and a youth appeared; he seemed about eighteen years old, was very effeminate, and dressed in gypsy style. He entered with the compliments of the evening and took his place between Antoñita and Doña Consuelo. He took up the perfume bottle from the dressing-table and sprayed the lapels of his jacket and his pocket-handkerchief. Then he borrowed the polisher and began to brighten his nails.

"You seem to think I keep all my outfit for your use," grumbled Antoñita as she snatched the polisher from his hands.

"Leave Lyrio alone, Toñita. Tell me what difference it makes. You don't behave like brother and sister."

Marmol threw a frosty look from Lyrio to Toñita:

"No, they don't; they look like sisters to me," he said as if he were thinking aloud.

Antoñita laughed while Lyrio turned a look of supplication. Then he fastened on the old hag:

"Let me have some money, mamá."

"I haven't got a cent. Have you a dollar, Don Alfonso?"

Marmol held out a dollar without indicating anybody in particular, Doña Consuelo took it and handed it to Lyrio, who pocketed it and with a good evening, disappeared from the group.

Antoñita was dressed at last—an English gown of blue cloth trimmed with gray and a large hat covered with ornaments. Doña Consuelo wrapped her shoulders in a shawl. All were leaving. At the door was drawn up Alfonso's automobile.

"Where are you going?" asked Hurtado of Doña Consuelo.

"Wherever Alfonso takes us."

The machine went off with a roar. Telesforo and Albert were again alone.

"What shall we do, Albert?"

"I haven't an idea," he seemed nervous and troubled.

The Gardens of San Agustín lay in nightly silence. Crossing them Telesforo and Albert

came upon an open plaza of irregular form. Two men were seated before a table in front of a café discussing at the top of their voices the latest events on the waterfront. Inside the café the servants were placing the chairs on top of the tables for the night.

“Would you like a bottle of beer?”

“Let us rather walk for a while and then turn in; what do you say, Telesforo?”

One of the streets leading into the little plaza had porticos on both sides. Albert turned through it carelessly. Their footsteps resounded with a hollow reverberation in the gloom. At the base of one column there was a pile of baskets. A cat slipped out and fled. There was a dire smell of dead fish. Over the roof of a portico directly above Albert came a noise from the inner house. And suddenly his imagination was filled with the secret fecundity of the inert and silent city. These houses were no longer black cold structures but were alive with the mysterious activities of family life at that very hour. Home—Albert had never known a home.

“Home, sweet home,” he hummed aloud.

“What did you say?”

But Albert did not hear Telesforo’s ques-

tion, for through the opening at the end of the street he caught sight of the stars. Two in particular attracted his eyes and thoughts. He was greatly given to watching the stars by night. Now more sublime and moving than it ever was as a heaven sown with dead orbs, it appeared a great sphere of homes peopled by living things. Angels had descended from on high to dwell in the regions of men. And Albert thought of the infinitude of children's heads reposing on their pillows. A child! He thought on the house of Don Medardo and Josefina, virginal, submissive, awaiting the words of annunciation. Telesforo pulled him by the sleeve.

"Come, man, are you a sleep-walker?"

They were before an open door. Behind it shone a lighted window through two iron bars.

"Shall we go up?"

Albert, unthinking, nodded assent; all his feelings reversed, he found himself seated in a chair of jute. A woman leaning across the arm of it drew him to her by throwing her arm around his neck and patting his cheek with her other hand. He felt a great repugnance and tried to rise to his feet, but the woman, putting

her lips to his ear, whispered with her warm breath:

“Stay. Don’t be disagreeable, boy.”

The accent she threw on *boy* showed him that she was not a native and that she used it to increase the tenderness she desired to express. Her body was slender, her eyes dark, and tired-looking, her complexion light without make-up or color. Her hair was bobbed, hanging in tufts on either side. She seemed sad, affectionate, and without perversion.

Telesforo on another seat held two women seated on his knees. He appeared proud and happy; Albert could not imagine why. A great ox-like woman badly dressed came into the room to ask the gentlemen if they would not have something to drink.

“Bring some beer,” answered Telesforo.

Again Albert tried to get to his feet.

“No, no, I shall not permit you.”

“But I wish to look at the book on the table.”

“I shall get it for you,” and she leaned over to the table and handed the book to him.

Albert read the title, *Genio y Figura*, by Juan Valera.

"Who reads that sort of book here?"

"I do." Albert showed his teeth scornfully.

"Yes, I read it and enjoy it greatly." Then she whispered him: "My name is Magdalena; I have been a school-teacher. I can play on the piano and speak some French. Shall I recite some verses for you?"

*Laissons à la belle jeunesse
ses folatres emportemens;
Nous ne vivons que deux moments.
qu'il en soit un pour la sagesse.*

"The quotation does not seem quite apropos."

"Speak lower," she whispered hurriedly, "or they will be laughing at me."

For a while Albert considered; Magdalena inspired him with pity and antipathy at the same time.

"All right, now I am going," he rose with decision.

"No, no," and she embraced him with her cheek against his.

"Don't be ridiculous," called Telesforo.

"Stay for once, youngster, and then you can enter the convent," cried one of the women in Hurtado's arms.

Albert's face was flushed.

"Don't notice her," Magdalena assured him under her breath. "She is an ordinary thing."

Albert drank two glasses of the beer. He felt himself ridiculous and ashamed. He wished to rescue himself, but did not know how. He felt scorn for himself.

Hurtado, accompanied by his women, left the room. They were all smoking cigarettes. From the door he called:

"Good night, Albert. Until to-morrow and, if you leave us, happy voyage. You see, if Marmol takes one from us, it is necessary to choose only two."

Albert did not reply, but Hurtado drew up, touching himself on the forehead:

"What a memory! I had forgotten about the voucher. We can do it this minute." Albert ran through his notebook.

"This will do for one."

"Yes, that's all right."

Hurtado scribbled among the glasses and bottles on the table.

"Now, just sign here." Albert did so. "Now the acknowledgment. Take it. It will be just as when the deposits were with the Meumiret firm. Good-bye."

A few minutes later, Albert was rushing away, his hair in disorder, his eyes distracted. He ran down the lower stairs paying no attention to Magdalena's voice, calling, "Wait till I see you out," and as he closed the door with a slam: "What a devil of a fellow. Not even a tip of a penny!"

Once in the street he did not know which way to turn. He looked up stupidly at the moon round and inexpressive, and realized a feeling of dread over what seemed to be her sad omen. The watchman called as he came out of a portico farther on. He was a garrulous official and came up ironically, saying:

"Hah, out on a lark, eh?"

Albert restrained his impatience.

"How does one get from here to the Hotel del Pino?"

The watchman told him the way briefly and Albert slipped some coppers to him and started off quickly. His heart was flooded with sorrow.

Behind him the watchman set up a sort of chorus of lamentation, groaning out:

"One o'clock; one o'clock!"

XIII

At eleven o'clock the next morning Albert was making preparations to start for Cenciella. Before setting out he wrote Fina this brief note:

SEÑORITA JOSEFINA TRAMONTANA.

Fina: My conscience demands that I formally renounce you. I am unworthy of your love. Try to forget me. Do not try to learn the reasons for my determination. It is sufficient that you hear from my own lips that I am unfit for you. Good-bye; perhaps we shall never meet again. I fear I am causing you sorrow; pardon me. If I did not have the resolution to break our engagement to-day, it is likely that greater sorrows would only accumulate for you in the future and you would come to despise me. Take this for a bit of consolation, a poor consolation, I am afraid.

Farewell. I love you now more than ever. I shall love you forever, most admirable and purest of women.

ALBERT.

He carefully folded the note, sealed it and handed it to Manuela directing that she herself deliver it that evening at Don Medardo's.

He reached Cenciella at five o'clock. He went around the town and entered his grounds through the rear entrance. As he dismounted, Manolo hurried out greatly surprised and embarrassed.

"Don't you know what has happened, Señor?"

"You will have to tell me."

"But—it couldn't be true. There has been some mistake. No, it couldn't be true. What concern we have felt! Let Rufa tell you, or Celedonio; they could do it. Why, there has been nothing else talked of in the town. It doesn't look as if they thought much of the master."

At the same time out ran Sultan barking and Azor limping on his three legs.

"Well then, Manolo, let us suppose I know what they are saying."

"Well then, you should know that the police have been here looking for you. They said, what shall I say?—will the master permit me to tell him?"

"Don't mind me at all."

"Then the master will know how to handle the matter."

"Of course, I know what to do. Has anything special occurred?"

"Nothing."

"Then you may leave me."

He heard outside the sounds of voices.

"What is that, Manolo?"

"It is in the plaza, sir."

"I suppose they are coming to lynch me."

Manolo smiled stupidly.

"Perhaps so."

"You think so? Are you so impertinent?"

"I have not expressed myself clearly. I wanted to say that—what I——" He did not understand the word "lynch" and was mixed up.

Albert, who understood his limitations, dismissed him with a smothered smile.

"You can go."

He had hardly gone out when up came Rufa trembling and doleful.

"Alas, little master, what have we here? Bad luck, bad luck," and she crossed herself repeatedly.

"This is too much!" said Albert, beating his feet on the floor. "Please calm yourself, Rufa; no more foolishness for I am at the end of my patience."

Rufa dried her tears and stared into Albert's eyes as if to discover if they were blood-thirsty and criminal.

"Alas, these cursed people here, bad luck to

them. They say—and with the blue angel eyes," she sighed in compliment to Albert's orbs.

"All right, all right, Rufa. Hurry up and don't pay attention to these wild stories." He patted her head which was covered by a large coarse piece of cloth. "What noise is that out on the plaza?"

"That is all right. There are some clowns to perform to-night. The whole town is excited over them. This morning they paraded through the streets. It was a brilliant showing. And how they blew the trumpet! It was like thunder. You know, Señor, how every night I am in my bed at nine o'clock; but to-night I intend to go to see the clowns. I cannot die without this pleasure. They say they are of the very best."

"I shall go too, and pay for your ticket, Rufa, if they have tickets. Perhaps when all is over they will pass the hat."

"I think it's that way, Señor. They pass the hat as they do everywhere except among the rich. But you know, you have been out in the world."

"Very well then. Now get me a glass of

milk. I shall sleep until it is time for the clowns."

He threw himself on the bed without undressing. He turned and tossed, but could not get to sleep.

His heart beat heavily against his side and his nerves caused him to shift about. Weariness at length overcame him. He was awakened by the sound of a cornet. The show was beginning. He leaped up and ran down the stairs to find Rufa all prepared for the novel ceremonies; she was dressed up in her finest,—mittens, a shawl that looked like a dolman, a fan bearing the figure of a cat in natural size on a green background, the gift of Albert, and a large prayer-book.

"What is this, Rufa," he asked indicating the prayer-book.

Rufa looked confused, then touched her forehead with the fan saying:

"I must be crazy. See what age will do. I never put on this dress except to go to church. Lord, Lord, how stupid! What a scandal, with a prayer-book! Well, well it is only a venial sin."

Albert gave her two pesetas in case there

should be a charge at the door and made his escape.

In the public plaza was erected a circle of benches enclosed by canvas. The people of Cenciella gathered like a flock of bees within this improvised circus and from time to time there issued forth the rumor of their childish buzzing. At the entrance under six great acetylene torches stood a skinny, crabbed woman dressed in a coat of mail. Beside her was a man of about fifty years, with ruddy nose and cheeks and large stomach. He was dressed in a swallow-tail coat whose lapels under his heavy breathing rose and fell like the wings of a buzzing grasshopper. Albert asked for a seat in the first rows. A young man in a worn and dirty gown under which might be detected the costume of an acrobat, his cheeks smeared with scarlet, led him to his seat. He was to sit on a bench without a back just behind the rope which stretched from post to post to mark the limits of the sawdust ring. He had hardly sat down when he felt a touch on his shoulder.

“Sir, you are wanted outside.”

“Who is it?”

"Morciello. He wishes you to come at once as he has something to say to you."

Morciello was the judge of Cenciella. Albert started out impatiently as he knew the object of the conference. The lad guided him to where Morciello stood waiting. His hand to his mouth, the judge gave a short tubercular cough; his overcoat was thrown over his shoulders like a cape; in his cheeks two great hollows belied the humor sparkling in his eyes. While he coughed, Albert took the opportunity to speak:

"I know why you have sent for me and I wish to say that I cannot understand why this stupid lie, utterly without foundation, should persist so long. Therefore, I feel myself excused from saying another word and I return to my seat.

"One moment, I beg of you. I am not in a position to judge whether the matter is stupid or not. It is sufficient that you say it is so. The real question is this: I have received a demand from the Court of Pilares that I should detain you, which I am unwilling to do because I do not forget the favors I owe to your father, especially this judgeship which I hold through

his influence. I imagine that this whole affair concerns some youthful spree and it can be arranged without coming to any serious difficulty. Therefore, I resolve to close my eyes. But you will understand that I cannot go to the circus and sit near you during the evening and in the morning assume that I have no understanding with you. The responsibility —please return to your house and to-morrow leave Cenciella and everything will be arranged.”

“Pardon me, but I don’t care for your arrangement; I am set on following my own devices. Good evening.”

“Then you will oblige me to miss seeing the performance.”

“Do as you please about that; good evening.” Turning on his heel he left Moriello.

Throughout the performance Albert sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands buried in his chin, his eyes fixed on the tricks of the circus. Through all his spirit he felt an upheaval. The widow Cioretti, sitting not far off, studied him with her gaze, imagining that he was suffering the extremes of remorse and, moved by tender compassion, she wondered

how she might reach him at the close of the performance and bring him some comfort.

Already the audience was moving out, chattering enthusiastically of the daring and grace of acrobats and clowns. Albert sat where he was, his cheeks twisted up in his fingers. The widow realized that for the evening she must renounce her charitable intent. When the people were gone, Albert raised his head and looked around him; he was alone. He vaulted over the rope, cut across the ring, and made for the dressing-room of the performers. He struck his hands together. One of the clowns, Pichichi, responded as he continued to remove his coat of white-lead by means of a rough cloth,

“What do you wish?”

“The Director.”

“He is changing his clothes.”

“I would like to speak with him.”

“Couldn’t you find some other time?”

“No.”

“And if he will not speak with you.”

“He will.”

“Are you a sharpshooter?”

“No more of your clowneries, friend, the

performance is over,"—and he held out a five-peseta piece.

"Oh, *Egsto egstar*, a mighty *argiment*," he said, imitating the French macaronic that he used in his farces. He made a mock reverence and disappeared.

"Please come in," was heard from the inclosure.

Albert stepped in carefully. It was a small space of canvas. He lifted the green curtain and found himself before the tall thin man who was now in his shirt sleeves.

"Come up into the caravan. Be careful, four steps," he spoke through his teeth, his tongue against his palate in the manner affected in the English parodies. Albert fancied that his host was some Saxon born in Spain, perhaps at Pontevedra or Lugo.

"One, two, three, four," he counted as he took the steps. On mounting them he said, "Oh, thanks, many thanks. I am so glad to meet you. You are Mr. Leviton, I suppose, are you not?"

Mr. Leviton was abashed and struck with sudden aphasia. Albert found the occasion much to his liking and was disposed to prolong it. He examined the scene; he was in the van

of the acrobats. The fitting of the interior was of various woods like the decoration of a railroad car. A lamp hung from the roof, two windows on the sides, and soiled, ill-smelling garments piled on the benches. Toward the front of the entrance stretched a patched curtain to make a sort of alcove behind which people were stirring. On the side of the curtain with Albert and Mr. Leviton was a woman seated straight and high on a drum; she was wrapped in a dirty shawl which showed the bottom of a yellow skirt and flabby legs. Her face was a sagging mass; bags beneath the eyes, bags around the mouth, bags in the cheeks, bags in the triple chin, not to mention the bags of her body. Her flesh was falling off in lumps. It was evident that she had been enormously stout and that some cruel disease had started to consume her piecemeal. Her glance was troubled and sorrowful. Albert asked in English if she were not Mr. Leviton's wife, but he, remaining dumb while Albert, continuing in the sweet language of Shakespeare, swallowed his laughter.

The woman at last spoke up with a weary voice that showed its rancorous habit.

"What a mule he is making of you, Victor,"

then turning her eyes toward Albert: "He is from Calahorra of the Calahorras. If you speak Spanish, explain yourself, sir, and pardon him for not knowing how to reply."

"If I speak Spanish? It is for you to pardon me, Victor. The lady called you Victor. I desire that we be friends."

"This is all due to the practice of public-speaking," sputtered Victor, as he frowned over his shoulder at his wife. "And you needn't stick your tongue in to talk trash. Such wind—it will kill you one of these days."

"It is you who would kill me, alas!" and she trembled under her shawl.

"Papa—Mama," called a youthful voice from behind the curtain.

"Let us have peace," said Albert laughing. "I wish to repeat that I desire we should all be friends."

Then he went on to explain his purpose. He desired to form a part of the company and to follow it across the country. Victor and Ramona studied him from head to foot without knowing what to answer. Rosita stuck her nose and eyes through a hole in the curtain. In the silence a horse was heard cropping up the grass outside. At last Victor asked:

“What can you do?”

“Work with the clowns.”

“What wages?”

“No need to speak of them.”

“This life of ours is pretty hard——”

Ramona sighed.

“Then we shall make it easy. Let us lift our circus to the highest rank.”

Victor started at hearing Albert speak of the circus as ours.

“Did you say ours?”

“Yes; I shall be the impresario—an impresario who will give up all the profits. I can offer you at once ten thousand pesetas. Will that do?”

“Goodness gracious!” murmured Ramona.

Rosita’s nose made a larger hole in the curtain.

“There’s nothing more to say; here’s my hand.”

“When do we leave?”

“To-morrow at eight in the morning.”

“Then I shall go and get my bag. I shall be back in a half hour. I can sleep here, can’t I?”

“Here in the car, no. You can sleep in the

tent with my son, and Fernando and the others. Close quarters for you, but——”

“What difference. And here are five dollars to get a supper to celebrate my coming. Ah, I shall bring along a dog that I am training.”

“The man and the monkey,” declared Victor rather mysteriously.

On returning to his house Albert asked Manolo if he desired to accompany him on his vagabond outing. Manolo was slow to reply, so that Albert fancied he did not wish to refuse for fear of annoying his master.

“Very well then, you can stay here as I do not wish to force you. But I don't know when I shall be back.”

“In that case I might as well tell you, sir, that I am thinking of going, as well as yourself”—and scratching his head—“because I am planning to marry.”

“Well, now——”

“I have announced my engagement. It is to Teresuca the servant of the De Oliva family.”

“Yes. I know her; very pretty and suitable.”

“But it happens that I am so poor; if you could help me, sir——”

"What are you planning to do after you marry?"

"What do I think of doing? Well, well—"

"To what will you devote yourself?"

"Ah, that's what concerns me; I wish to remain in Cenciella as a merchant of wood—a prosaic occupation, is it not, sir?"

"Come, come! Since when did you start to bother whether a thing was prosaic or poetical?"

Manolo smiled in a sulky way.

"I have been reading many of the master's books after my work was done."

"Come then, how much do you really need."

"Eight or ten thousand pesetas, I think."

Albert sat down to write.

"While I am writing get my valise ready with some underclothing."

He wrote an order to Telesforo directing him to pay ten thousand pesetas to his valet and to forward another ten thousand to Meredo, a town near Cenciella where there was a bank for collection.

"Here, Manolo. To-morrow go to Pilares, to the bank of Don Celso Robles and ask for

Señor Hurtado. He will give you the ten thousand."

"Ah, Señor, how I shall thank you?" he muttered, kissing Albert's hand.

"That's enough; don't be childish," answered Albert, slightly moved.

"Don't you wish me to give you a receipt?"

"None is necessary. You are a good industrious fellow. You will surely succeed. When it will be easy, you can return me the nine-thousand-five-hundred. The other five hundred will make your wedding present. Where is Azor? Azor! Azor!" The lame dog appeared. "Come, my boy, we are off to see the world. Give me the bag, Manolo."

"I shall carry it for you."

"Not at all. I'll carry it myself. Good-bye, Manolo, and good-luck. Ah, tell nobody where I went, or how I started."

Manolo, between his astonishment and appreciation of the note Albert had given him, was unable to say another word.

XIV

To SEÑOR DON JUAN HALCONETE:

DEAR HALCONETE,

You desire me to give you some glimpse of the actual life, for which at present I lay aside my ordinary philosophies. You don't care for my philosophizing for two reasons: either my disquisitions seem to be capricious and of small importance, or else, knowing that they bring me sorrow, you would take my thoughts back again to the external facts of life. I will not concern myself as to your motive. You advise me, and I am resolved to follow your counsel in complete docility. Look on this letter, therefore, as a mere descriptive document.

The company to which I am attached for the last two weeks is composed of thirteen members of different sexes and species.

The boss is called Victor—the head of this wandering crew, and a swollen head at that. Apparently, a head is a callous substance or protuberance rising above the shoulders without any use that is discoverable. So with our director; nevertheless, what should we be without him? for he is the theory, the idea as well as the instrument of our existence. He has not strength enough for jumping, nor grace to play the crown, nor boldness for the trapeze, nor cleverness for juggling. But he knows the essential secrets of all these tricks, and when you least suspect it he can bring the muscles, the grace, bravery, and gifts of others to their best uses. He brags a great deal and is self-conscious to his fingertips as he moves across the ring with his long whip in his hand, and affects a profound knowledge of gymnastic science. He has interested me greatly in the many curious particulars of acrobatism. Mr. Leviton, that is his assumed name, belongs to the second class of the two divisions of the circus-world, *les artistes de rencontre*, as he calls them. While yet a child he joined

the company of Monsieur Grignon and early demonstrated his aptitude for what the English call the *hand-balance* and the Germans *hand-staender* or standing on one's hands.

"I, friend Albert," he assures me in his professional manner, "have come to do the *montée en planche* and the *montée par groupement* with the same ease as I drink this glass of aguardiente. And I have jumped, too—how I have jumped, señor! I even have done the *twist*. Now I ask you, sir—let us be clear on this—if I began in the profession at the age of ten or twelve, should it be said that I belong merely to the *artistes de rencontre*? Would it not be more just to me to say I belonged to the *enfants de la balle*?"

What is the difference, you will ask, dear Juan. Let Mr. Leviton answer the question. Listen.

"To be clearer, the *enfants de la balle* are, in so many words, the aristocrats of the art. What is necessary to make a titled count for example? To be born of a count and a countess. The *enfants de la balle* have the blood of artists through inheritance, let us say. My wife, Madame Ramona, is an aristocrat; my children Mamerto and Rosita are aristocrats. Is it too much pretense on my part to claim to be also an aristocrat, after what I have told you? The others, those *artistes de rencontre* are, in fact, nothing else than intruders. Intruders, well hardly that in spite of the fact that they can prove no old blood. I shall explain: among them are artists of considerable merit, famous artists; but lacking the open air in their earliest years, lacking the apprenticeship of those years of formation, can the results be quite adequate? Those artists who begin in later life can devote themselves only to the gymnasium apparatus: the rings, horizontal bars, and flying-trapeze. One of the trio Jupiter was originally a tailor. But true gymnastics, the most aristocratic gymnastics, are those of the mat. Those are the royal exercises"—and with a gesture of

absolute conviction—"and the artist of the mat can never be improvised."

In his moral qualities Victor is a barbarian as a husband and a semi-barbarian as a father. He has, they tell me, a mistress on whom he spends a goodly portion of his earnings. This woman follows our itinerary, but never appears. I know I have never seen her.

Now let us speak of Madame Ramona. It is important to go back to an earlier date, only a year ago, when she is said to have tipped the scales at one hundred and thirty kilograms, yes, sir, not a tittle less. To-day she weighs something between eighty and ninety. The beginning of this tremendous shedding of flesh occurred on the day she learned that her husband was unfaithful to her—which is to say, that about one year ago Madame Ramona was a mastodon of the sentimental sort. They tell me that her appearance was always a striking success and consisted of bare-back riding, in the style of Franconi, on a busted old dray-horse called Pionono. With the loss of her forty and more kilos her appearance is striking and repugnant. Her skin which in former times must have been tough, and stretched as an abbot's stomach, has now fallen and darkened like loose rubber. She hangs flaccid in every part, like a great drooping bat. On several occasions I have caught her weeping secretly.

The son Mamerto is a taciturn, hollow-eyed youth. His glance is remarkable for its deep and hidden fire. He is lazy and hardly speaks a word. He occupies his leisure hours, which are many, in tearing the green branches off the trees and slowly stripping them of their leaves while he whistles lugubrious tunes. His duty is to lead the horses to pasture in neighboring fields. One evening I could see him torturing the poor animals by beating them with his branches. Pionono was his chief victim. The rascal laughed wildly at their sufferings. His number on the program is the trapeze,

and Victor declares that some day he will outshine the glory of the marvelous Leotard.

Rosita is a backward girl, gentle and affectionate. There is only one thing that keeps her from being pretty and that is she is so ugly. Her skin is chalky and bloodless as the belly of a frog. Her blood is disordered. They informed me that she greatly desired to learn to read, so I am instructing her. She asks me for some verses and she sings and recites like a rusty hinge. Her specialty is crocheting (inherited from her mother) and other occupations suited to her sex. Her act is on the rings and she can do the mermaid swing and the monkey jump. (And take notice that these last two *enfants de la balle* are not artists of the mat.) Victor predicts that she will be more famous than the celestial Nathalie Fucart. Old Leviton has also suggested by certain indications that he would like me to take over the damsel. He seems to think differently from Teresa Cascajo; as a daughter with a good provider looks better to him than one poorly married, it goes without saying, I have not accepted the invitation.

Not counting the family of the Levitons, the hierarchy of the troupe contains a youth named Fernando, good-looking, sensible, and attractive, who seemed the pre-destined lover for Rosita before I joined the company. As he proved hardly amiable to the advances of the girl, my coming has been a veritable blessing for him. Physically, he is a handsome specimen of humanity. morally I deem him a normal individual intelligent and honest; artistically, powerful, elastic, and agile.

Then we come to Pichichi, large, thin, muscular, and active. His face at times shows a smiling kind of idiocy, at other times a keen malignity. His hobby is painting. As soon as we arrive anywhere he loses himself in a great work which he started some time ago—the sacred history they taught him as a child, put into pictures. The majority of his Biblical personages are clothed as circus-folk. His designs are disturbing in their primitive sim-

plicity; not only the persons but the details as well seem to be seen with extraordinary intensity. His colors, mineral and vegetable, are made by himself. A curious peculiarity of this clown is that his songs and proverbs are Italian. For example, when I have thought to interfere so as to bring Victor and Ramona together, for their continual quarreling bothers me, Pichichi whispers me mysteriously: "*Tra moglie e marito non bisogna mettere il dito.*"

And "last but not least" is the other clown Maimon. Why do they call him Maimon? I don't know. Perhaps it is some reflection of his costume and his actions. He is what the English call a tumbler, a clown that can fall so heavily as to make tremendous noise. I can declare that Maimon is a wonder and when he strikes his stomach against the sawdust the very ground seems to shake. Another quality of Maimon is his voice which is worthy of being heard in our halls of oratory.

This letter is growing too long, so I shall make an end of it. Until I write again.

YOUR
ALBERT.

DEAR JUAN:

From your answer I copy the question, "What are you doing for the public? Do you jump? Do you perform on the trapeze? Or on the rings? Resolve my doubts." Here's where I answer you.

For the first thing, I spend my money: that is something, isn't it? Since my last letter we have purchased an enormous organ which sounds like an orchestra. The largest part of its selections consists of cake-walks and those nervous little circus waltzes that produce the strange impulses to cause the nerves to jump and swing, throw objects in the air and run around to nowhere in particular. When I hear them I understand what the Greeks called *Kallocagathia* which, if I mistake not, is an ideal of perfect physical life. What pleasure, what fulfilment to make fancy steps, duckings, dangerous

leaps to the sounds of such music! And what sorrow to feel merely like an *artiste de rencontre* and to realize that it is too late to begin to cultivate the body!

But aside from prodigality of the purse, I have on the program my number which I assure you is received with great applause. The idea is not my own, but is snatched boldly from a performer I have seen in the London Music Halls. It consists of modeling characters in clay rapidly before the public. I have never gone in for modeling, but I seem to possess a knack of turning out these sketches in a jiffy. The English artist worked only in gray clay. I have made my innovation and have several cans of different colors and the result of my combinations is very picturesque. A mouth for instance, may be suggested by two streaks of red; some smears of yellow or brown suggest a blond head or a brown. Then there is the distance and the imagination of the audience. My gallery contains pictures of the old woman, the priest, the political boss, the post-box, the civil-guards, and the cow. They are not complete statues for that would take too much time; they are done in relief against a blackboard.

While I am working on them, the organ plays a most exquisite cake-walk and Rosita, clothed in spangles, struts about and sings some English songs I have taught her, such as "The Honey-suckle and the Bee," "Teasing," and "Hullo, Hullo, my Baby."

My plans are growing more ambitious. I am meditating a series of transcendental pantomimes. I hope to carry on from village to village an active propaganda in morals, making use of what I call acrobatic anarchy. I am sure you comprehend the connection between morals and anarchy; therefore, no need to dwell on this point.

It is now growing late, so I shall leave the explanation of my plans for another day.

YOUR FRIEND
ALBERT.

I add a postscript to this letter to tell you in a word or two that something has occurred. It seems that the Pastor of Limio, who is a barbarian, has brought a charge against us in court, accusing us of attacks upon religion in our show. You see how our theories have worked out. Victor, his wife, the children, and Maimon are trembling in their shirts. I tell them it is nothing, but don't seem to convince them. I know they curse me in their hearts. Fernando has said nothing and Pichichi, the Biblical painter, has exclaimed heroically: "*A me ne importa proprio un fico secco.*"

If they call on me to declare my identity they lose me, for in giving my name I shall rob my adventure of all its motive. I have hidden myself thus far with diligence and art. We shall soon see how the thing will turn out.
Adios,

ALBERT.

XV

When Albert came before the court as author of the farce, the judge bounded to his feet:

"Albert!"

"Just as you please: it is very amusing."

The pastor who was present started to rub his stomach under his soutane as though his intelligence radiated from that direction and the rubbing aroused his faculties.

"Albert who?" he asked anxiously.

Albert stared at him a moment and then went on speaking to the judge.

"Really, I am afraid that you have destroyed my anonymity."

"It did seem as though the earth had swallowed you up."

The officials were confused. The pastor persisted:

"Albert who?" and as nobody answered him he added: "Your Honor, we are at the sessions of a court and not in the casino."

"And for that reason, Reverend Sir, you will do me the favor of keeping still."

To ask Don Ataulfo the intimate of the local boss to shut up!

"I have said Albert who?"

Albert then answered him:

"Albert Diaz de Guzmán, at your service. It is strange with what interest I inspire you."

"Blessed be God," exclaimed the pastor. "People will say there is no providence! Can Your Honor not see His finger clearly?"

"Most clearly," answered the Judge, counting his fingers with his eyes.

"I meant the fingers of Providence."

"Ah, I presume so."

"What is all this about?" questioned Albert, beginning to feel unsettled.

"It is about," said the judge, "it is about—but we are sitting in court."

"Do you admit the name of Albert Diaz de Guzmán?"

"Come, man, it is not you who are asking me such a question? Haven't we studied for four years together? Haven't we raised Cain together in class with Chorizo, Llimiagon, and Gocha Juridica?"

"Señor Guzmán," continued the Judge, his face twisted into a grimace, "I am no longer that comrade of yours called Enrique Llamedo y Pando, but an abstract entity, a substantial, and eternal principle called Justice. I have not studied a particle of law either with you or anybody else."

"And right well I know it. You are taking a fine stand."

"Defendant, I call you to order."

"Quite in time and very just," murmured Don Ataulfo.

"And so I make you aware that for some time you have been wanted for a case of violation and murder."

"Not for violation, Your Honor," corrected the pastor. "She was a public character."

"No matter for that. I say for violation, etc., etc. Besides which I would add that for some time you have been wanted and this jurisdiction having, with the aid of the undeniable finger of Providence, been able to apprehend you, offering up to Him a vote of thanks, I decree that you be delivered to the Civil Guard to conduct you to Pilares on the first train that leaves for the capital. Officer, do your duty."

"But, child," said Albert with asperity, "your ironic discourse does not interest me in the slightest. If you have no belief in all this, why continue this tommy-rot?"

"Defendant, I charge you to use only words to be found in the Dictionary of the Academy."

"The truth is that I could not believe the mystery could be maintained so long a time."

"Again I call your attention to the Dictionary."

"What rot!" losing his temper.

"To the Dictionary, the Dictionary," continued the Judge, hardly repressing a guffaw.

Meanwhile, Victor and the others huddled in a corner raised a trembling voice:

"Might it please His Honor that we—we didn't know anything about——"

"Ah, that's another point. You are all his confederates," and he winked at Albert, wishing him to join in baiting the circus folk, but Albert only showed irritation.

"Neither confederates nor dunces."

"Very well; seeing the defendant declares that you had nothing to do with it, you are discharged."

"No, not that," insisted the pastor. "And the case against them for disrespect of our holy religion?"

"These people have been the innocent tools of Guzmán. The testimony shows it. Guzmán is a——"

"Blasphemer," added Don Ataulfo.

"Pardon me, Reverend Father," said Albert. "I believe in doing good to humanity in the manner of Monsieur Rignon with his orthopedic apparatus."

"How cynical!" growled the pastor.

"Yes and how Cyreniac," added the Judge.

At that moment there entered the two Civil Guards—one long, thin and heavily mustached; the other fat and chubby. Between them Albert was led to the station, in a fine, cursing

rage. As he waited on the platform, Llamedo approached him and whispered to him privately:

"My dear chap, I couldn't do anything else. Don't fancy that I am ignorant of where Rosina is lurking, but I could not declare it. You have fallen into the hands of that beast, Don Ataulfo. As to who is holding the girl, yes, I see that you know also. Of course we have all enjoyed the rumpus and the wild rumors that have been circulated, but as you seem to have reached the end of the joke, I shall send for Rosina who at present is in Madrid and have her come before the court. I fancy that she knows nothing at all about the affair. Probably she cannot read and he tells her nothing about it. And so, Bertuco, a tiresome joke, but life is so short. Resign yourself. Would you like a cigarette?"

XVI

It was night when Albert entered the prison of Pilares, a rainy winter evening. The warden, a tired colorless man in a jacket with

worn embroideries and a rough pair of trousers, received him courteously. He asked if he wished a private cell and Albert replied that he wished to be treated like everybody else. The inmates had not yet retired to their compartments, as it was the hour of recreation.

Albert was led into a long dark hall; on one side were windows with bars of iron opening on Adosinda Street and at each of them was a man like a spider in his web whispering to somebody outside. The place was bare of furniture. The inmates formed hostile groups; some, withdrawn from the others, sat with their shoulders against the blackened walls scrawled with vulgar writings and sketches. A young man cleanly attired was standing under a skylight trying to catch the last light of day on the book he was reading. One of the men leaning against the barred windows let forth a falsetto shriek, a response to which in a truly feminine tone was heard from far away.

“Ah, Neru!” declared the warden.

A keeper who was near at hand administered two slashes on his back.

"How often have I to warn you to keep your shrieks in your dirty goat's head?" he demanded in anger.

The warden explained to Albert:

"He is a pickpocket who works in confederacy with a woman crook. One is always taken with the other. As the women's ward is on the other side, they have established a code of signals by means of these piercing shrieks."

Albert noticed that there was one, the best fed whom all of the groups around the hall treated with evident consideration as a being of superior sort—a corpulent man, yellowed and heavily bearded, the black hair growing higher on his jaws and forming a solid ebony base in Dutch fashion to his face. He left the impression that he felt his importance by solemn manners and brevity of words. Across his knees was resting a feeble, exhausted boy.

"What are you looking at?" asked the warden. "Yes, it is curious. That is Morillo, you have heard of him, no doubt. He killed the priest of Celorio with a shotgun during the mass. Barely two months of life are left him now before they will strangle him. There is

no pardon for him; it would be too much to ask the clergy to forgive him."

"And the young man?"

"That is 'Strawberry'! He got that nickname, it seems, on account of the rather scarlet career he has had. He is a pickpocket and lives constantly in prisons. The day he is discharged he is sent back again. I don't need to tell you what he is, but the inmates quarrel over him and even come to blows. There have been real battles here on his account."

"Ah, he is then the Helen of your Troy."

"Something like that," replied the warden, who was not strong on mythology. "The strongest gets him, as in the animal world; only animals are generally faithful and this unfortunate delights to be the object of a fight and conducts himself so as to excite the jealousy of his mate and to start the others going. You see, one of his eyes is blackened from Morillo's fist. All of which is disgusting and severely prohibited, but it is impossible to suppress it. As far as I am concerned, it seems only natural that, shut off as they are for a long time from others different from themselves, they grow hard and insensible. Every day I grow more tolerant and have even come to

believe that behind the bars all responsibility is somewhat confused."

Albert listened religiously to these words of the warden, registering them on his tablets of brass. After a pause the warden added:

"You can stay here if you desire. I don't advise it, however. It will be more suitable for you to occupy my office; the rules permit that."

"I should prefer to speak with them, to question them, to learn——"

"You cannot learn anything definite from them now."

"If I should treat them to something."

"But their dinner hour is near."

"An extra dish of some kind?"

"It is too late. All you can get is cider."

"Yes, and cigars for all."

The warden raising his voice announced that this young señor, through circumstances their comrade for the evening, would treat them to cider and cigars. There was a dull general murmur. One voice cried: Hurrah! and another added: "Shut up, old goat; let him treat his grandmother!"

Then the warden spoke up:

"If it doesn't suit you, Mellao, you needn't drink or smoke any."

"Whether he likes it or not, he can wait and learn," added the keeper grimly.

"No force," said Albert. "I make the offer freely. If you don't like it you can leave it alone."

After giving the keeper some money, Albert and the warden went down to the office, a place of dirty broken furniture, where Albert sat on a sofa of the period of Louis-Phillipe with mahogany frame and sunken springs. On the wall in front of him hung a map of prisons and penitentiaries, each indicated in red ink.

"I suppose this will be the one evening we shall have your company."

"Why?"

"Because to-morrow you will procure your bail and they will discharge you after the court has arranged with your bondsmen. They tell me that there are grave charges against you; but few of these charges ever hold good."

Albert smiled sadly.

"But don't be troubled. You can imagine that I understand these things," explained the warden, trying to cheer Albert's embittered mind.

"I am not bothered about what you suppose.

You will soon see that this whole proceeding will be quashed."

"I believe it. Justice—especially in this country! Besides, how is one man to be the judge of another?"

There ran into the office dancing, a youngster about seven years old, neatly though poorly dressed, with pale face and dark eyes and a shock of black hair. She ran to kiss the warden who petted her lightly.

"Give the gentleman a kiss."

"What is your name?" asked Albert, holding her between his knees.

"Maria de la Luz Arizona y Gonzales, at God's service and yours, Señor."

"Luz, what a pretty name. Take this and buy a toy and remember the giver."

"Not at all. Luz, darling, give the dollar back to the Señor."

"It is not too much. Don't forbid her, warden. Keep it, little one," and in kissing her he felt himself stirred by a strange tenderness.

"But it is excessive. A single penny would be sufficient."

Albert had pressed the money in the child's hand; then he had shut it in his own softly.

"So; because I wish Luz to remember me."

"All right," said the warden, giving signs of gratitude; "it is to be shared with all the children; you hear that, darling?"

The youngster ran out and came back again in a moment to say:

"I forgot that supper is ready."

"Say to mama that I shall take my supper in the office; and to send two portions." Albert objected. "It is now I who insist."

They brought in the service with few words. The warden tried to distract his guest from his depression, but renounced his efforts, seeing that they were without success. At the end of the supper the warden repeated the question he had put to Albert on his arrival:

"Shall I have them prepare a special cell for you?"

"No, no, the same as for the others; that's my idea."

"Reflect how impossible they are."

"I can sleep in any bed."

"I don't doubt it, but by choice—in prison, for instance. It is one thing to do something disagreeable by preference and another to do a pleasant thing by force."

Albert repeated mechanically:

"By force! But in this case it is by choice."

"The selection of the cell, as a cell itself, is obligatory for one night at least."

Some bells sounded. Then they heard a violin.

"Excuse me, I shall be back in a moment."

"That violin?" asked Albert as soon as the warden came back.

"It is my Aurora's, the eldest. She would have preferred the piano, but we could not encourage such expensive tastes."

"From the cells the prisoners can hear the violin?"

"I think so, just as we hear it."

"It must sound melancholy to them."

A pause after which the warden said:

"I hadn't thought of that."

They fell into silence. Albert began to walk around the room.

The furniture shook under the rumble of a carriage.

"A coach," murmured Albert.

"Yes, a coach," repeated the warden. Silence fell again. Albert said:

"What peace!"

"Yes, what peace!" echoed the warden.

"With your permission I will retire, as I am very tired."

"At your service. I shall escort you to your cell. Is there anything you need for the night? milk, water?"

"Thank you, only water."

"There is a jar of it in the cell."

They reached the cell. The warden lighted a lamp; the room was small and dirty; a little barred window stood high against the roof. The furniture was a table, a wooden chair, and a cot covered with clean sheets.

"I see that you are stretching the regulation on my account," said Albert with a smile.

"Not at all. All this is permitted. And so, good night. You will pardon me for locking you in, but that is part of the regulations."

The walls were covered with scribbled epigraphs. Albert read some:

"Josefa, Josefa,
My darling treasure,
My heart's delight
In thee I measure.
Josefa, Josefa."

Besides this were obscenities, blasphemies, and scandalous drawings of vulgar art.

Albert undressed, put out the light, and lay down on the cot. "Josefa, Josefa," kept running through his mind. He could not regulate

his thoughts. He was just about to fall asleep when he suddenly came to himself; he believed he heard a voice whispering to him: "Come, come, where's your sense of humor?"

XVII

He awoke to the sound of a bell. It was still dark. A keeper appeared to tell him he might sleep until ten. Albert replied that he wished to get up and converse with the other prisoners, but the keeper informed him that this was permitted only during hours of recreation. At ten the clerk of the court arrived to take Albert's declaration. He replied dryly:

"You can say anything you like, as I have no purpose in answering your questions. It is quite useless for you to try to probe me in any way; think of all the paper you will save by this."

The clerk was not long in being convinced of Albert's resolution. Going down-stairs he delivered his impressions to his assistant:

"This is a most delightful case, one of the most interesting and touching that I have ever

handled. Have you looked closely at this Guzmán? ” The assistant nodded. “Haven’t you noticed the alarming brachicephalic indexes in his head? Yes he is a true brachicephalic.”

“I should say he was a rough one and something of a wit. Did you remark that smile of his?”

“It is imbecility, pure imbecility.”

Shortly after the keeper came in to say that there were several gentlemen waiting to see him.

“What names have they given?”

“I have not asked them; first I know there is Señor Renglon, the lawyer. No doubt you have heard of him. He is a great talker. There is no criminal he cannot get free.”

Another keeper stopped in passing to say:

“Don’t bother about that gas-bag. He frees them all, you say? Why you know that is a lie! Isn’t there Pujol and Janon? If you want a good lawyer, there is always Don Rufino Valle. He charges less than Renglon, much less.”

The first keeper was about to reply when there broke in another keeper attracted by the dispute:

"Why shout so much about nothing? Neither Valle nor Renglon are worth a tittle when compared with Don Leon Berrueco. Hasn't he had more than twenty years' experience over the others? It seems they must pay you for booming them so," he added with a flourish of cynicism.

"And what are you but a go-between?"

Albert cut them short:

"Neither Berrueco, nor Don Rufino, nor Renglon. Don't trouble yourselves, I don't need a lawyer. I am one myself and that is enough, and superfluous. As for the other visitors, let them explain their coming, as I am not quite well and shall not leave my cell. Another thing: I am resolved to have no conversation with people from the outside." There, was a look of decision in his eyes.

One keeper had the thought: This is a very demon and I can understand that he could massacre that female.

Throughout the day Albert spent all his time with the prisoners. At the beginning they showed themselves suspicious if not hostile, but one by one they yielded to his gentleness and simplicity. Mentally, he was classifying the prisoners into three classes, all three types of

irresponsibles. There were: Morillo the moral deficient; Neru, corrupted by social forces; and Fausto Peneda, victim of his passions.

It was Fausto who stood reading under the light on the day of Albert's entrance into the recreation hall, brilliant, strong, and handsome with his twenty-five years, his brown eyes and tangled locks. He told Albert the whole story of his life and tragedy. He was a native of a town called Linan, of farmer stock in comfortable circumstances. He had followed the trade of carpenter and had prospered in it. He had fallen in love and was engaged to marry a damsel *Telva la paloma* "as white and sweet as fresh butter. But bad luck would have it the Squire of Acena (I imagined it. It was a mad dream, by the Christ of the Rosary!)— I thought that Telva was impressed by his money, that she was dazzled and— With a sharp chisel of this length—from here to here"—and he marked his neck from ear to ear—"with all my strength! Alas, alas the blood she shed! I was covered from head to foot. She fell and I don't know how I kept my feet. She nearly died. They put me to trial. I have eight years to serve. She recovered, I

am glad to say, and we are lovers as before. When I get my freedom I shall be thirty-three and we shall get married."

"And the wound?"

"It is still there and when I see it on that little rose-face in the visitors' room across the bars, I am ready to die. Her left eye has lost its sight, but she is as pretty and engaging as ever. I would give my own two eyes to restore that blind one. What good am I and what use have been my eyes to me? Just to see mad things." He hid his face in his hands.

"Courage, Fausto," and Albert placed his hand on his shoulder. "Your good conduct in the prison will get you a pardon some day."

"So they say, but my pardon can never be granted. Even if the court did not condemn me, my sentence is written in her face and I can never blot it out."

"But she has pardoned you, you tell me."

"Yes, but that cannot clear me; I cannot pardon myself." After a silence he changed the subject to ask:

"And your case?"

"Mine is nothing at all."

"Nothing, then it is an error."

"I am glad for that. But there would have

been nothing extraordinary if it were true. Gentlemen are also men. You see how I?— who would have said it——?”

“I have no vanity about not having done the act, nor am I out to condemn other people; only I happen to be here through a mistake which will soon be explained. Believe me I am not sorry I came here.”

In retiring they passed Fausto’s cell.

“This is my cell; a large establishment,” he said as he pushed open the door.

The first thing that Albert saw was a great wicker cage at the side of the small window. It was empty.

“Have you had a bird in it?”

“A blackbird. My parents brought it. I always had a great knack or, if you will, patience, in teaching blackbirds to sing. In Linan my carpenter shop was one riot of them. Six blackbirds together; one that sang the *Bendita Magdalena*; another, the *Señor San Pedro*. There was one that used to try the *Praviana*,” and his eyes melted: then he took up the discourse again: “As I was telling you, my parents brought me a new blackbird so I might teach it some songs. It took all right to its cage, but, will you believe me,

whenever it sang I imagined that it was speaking. The things it said to me, and all of them so sad! Above all was its constant lament at being confined. The truth is, I had to let it go, it gave me such dread. It flew away mocking at me."

They parted and Albert kept to his cell; refusing the Warden's invitation to dinner under the pretext of a headache. But his real sorrow was at heart. At times his breast was flooded with an apostolic fever and he said to himself: Whither am I going, weak, dispirited, corrupt? Again he was bathed in a sweet and soothing tide as the memory of Fina came over him mysteriously.

The next morning when the keeper came to arouse him he was sleeping soundly. The sun was peeping through the little window.

"It must be late."

"Nearly eleven. The warden wishes you to dress and come down quickly as the lady whom they said—" he shrugged his shoulders—"you had assassinated has appeared in court, looking very healthy. You are set at liberty."

Clothed and brushed up, Albert came down to the warden's office to say good-bye and

thank him. A richly attired woman was seated with her back to the door. A mantilla of white lace was loosely wound around her head, the shining bronze hair showing through the silken meshes. She rose on hearing his footsteps.

“Rosina!”

She hid her blushing face and murmured:

“I had no idea—I swear to you. I have caused all this, but I had no intention. You will pardon me, you will pardon me, Señor.”

“Why, of course, Rosina, if you will pardon me. I have nothing to forgive you. Come let us leave here.”

Before departing Albert took the warden aside and said:

“When I first came here, knowing well what a mistake it was, I felt the injustice and ridiculousness of it all. But before to-day I have never known exactly what injustice is. Now that I am leaving, I firmly believe I ought to stay. Not only I, but——”

“I don’t understand you. From the first view of you I have felt distrust. At any rate you may always believe me your friend.”

They shook hands warmly and parted.

A pale, shrunken sun was lighting up the

street puddles as Albert and Rosina walked forth side by side, hardly speaking a word.

"I got here this morning on the express at half-past six. I stayed at home until ten and then went to the court. From the court I came direct to the prison. I did not know anything about it until he told me yesterday; he had received a telegram. You know whom I mean?"

"Yes."

"As he desired that nobody should suspect anything, it is nice to realize that people thought I was dead. And I believe that you also had died, I can tell you that."

Albert realized that the street they were taking would lead them in front of Fina's house.

"Let us turn up this way, this way," he asked anxiously.

They turned up a lonely street and came out at the park. The leaves were drying in reds and yellows. They sat down on a bench and Albert thought over all that had happened since he had been with Rosina in the same spot that evening at sundown. He rapidly meditated on what had happened; the attack upon the works of art; the moral standards

exemplified in his domestic animals, Fina's kiss, the night in Villaclara, Pichichi, the waggish judge and the serious judge, the mortal dampness of the prison, Morillo, Fausto—he seemed to be coming out of a dream. This sunlight pale and tremblous seemed to dematerialize everything. He ran his hand over his forehead. Meanwhile, Rosina went on talking, imagining that he was listening attentively and with the point of her umbrella rustled the dry leaves from side to side.

"But, that's enough. I have told you the main things. Mariquita and Luqui were at the house this morning. I have no idea from where they learned of my return. Imagine how early they must get up to be so—Mariquita wanted the twenty dollars I owe her. Luqui looked at me, looked at me, looked at me——"

Albert who happened to gather her last words asked, in order to say something:

"And what did you say to her?"

"I said: My, how stupid!"



PART SECOND
ON THREE LEGS

PART SECOND

ON THREE LEGS

*A noi venia la creatura bella
Bianco vestita e nella faccia quale
Par tremolando mattutina stella.*

—DANTE.

I



LONDON morning in February, 1907. It was nearly ten o'clock and a heavy fog hung over the city. The dining room was lighted by electricity. Against the outside of the leaded windows slid the trickle of yellow mist in tangled rifts like wool.

Albert was the last to leave the table. After the heavy British breakfast, he came out with languid step, lighting his pipe to do away with the memories of salt-herring, ham, Ceylon tea, and strawberry jam that stuck to his palate. He went out into the hall and approached the mahogany pigeon-holes where the mail for the

guests was sorted. He went over the section A. for Albert, D. for Diaz, and G. for Guzmán. He turned away smiling as he thought: But who is there to write me a letter. He was not brave enough to admit to himself that he was always waiting for a letter, a certain letter.

Then he entered the smoking room, intending to sit down or rather lie down in one of the great leather chairs, which they call Rothschilds. He turned his back to the windows and faced the flaming chimney-place. He threw himself back and raised his ankles as high as his head on the hearth-ledge of green and yellow tiles. He reached out blindly on his left and groped for the tray of beaten brass; he found the matchbox, also of brass, and struck a noisy wooden match to light his pipe. Then he ran over the pages of a periodical, soon threw it down beside him and closed his eyes. The warmth was luxury to his body. He was a fully satisfied animal.

He was approached by Mr. Marshall who touched him on the shoulder.

“Are you still sleeping?”

Albert opened his eyes.

“Not at all. I have had a good night’s rest.”

“A heavy fog,” added Mr. Marshall, point-

ing to the windows. Marshall always used a telegraphic style of speech. He was niggardly even with his syllables. He had the invariable habit of rising on his toes and dropping out of his slippers without considering who was in the company. Although he was almost eighty years old, he was still hale and hearty; his only weakness was to try to steal his baths so that they would not be charged against him in the bills which the hotel sent him every week, and in this line of activities he was a past-master and not infrequently he even boasted of it. For example, he would take out of his pocket his weekly statement, strike it with his finger, say "Four baths" and puff with satisfaction. This signified that he had robbed the management of six shillings, the baths costing a shilling and a half apiece. His face was marvelous in its lack of expression. His eyes were so buried in his skin, that out of the hollow wrinkle where they lurked they were only to be guessed at through an uncertain gleam, not a glance, but the ghost of a glance. His skin was smooth and darkened by a network of little veins; his nose curved over a mustache and side beards of snowy whiteness. He had a high stomach which gave him the air of the

traditional John Bull with his spreading high hat, his white breeches, and shining boots with the yellow turnovers.

Albert's interest was deeply aroused in him. One day he asked him:

"Are you married or single?"

Mr. Marshall admitted that he was a widower.

"Have you any family?"

Mr. Marshall raised his four fingers and answered:

"Daughters."

"Married?"

Mr. Marshall nodded.

"And how does it happen that you live alone in a hotel?"

Mr. Marshall drew in both his elbows and then opened his lower arms in a horizontal gesture, beginning to swing his body as if to imitate a goose or a duck. At the end he rubbed his stomach fondly. Which was to say: first, that it was not easy to decide between one daughter and another; and secondly, to declare that his preferred daughter, in fact, his father, mother, and entire family, in other words, his divinity itself, was his own stomach,

that mechanical dome to which he had given his whole devotion.

Finishing his smoke, Albert put down his pipe on the table beside the can of English tobacco. Then he took out a cigar de Murias and lit it.

"Extravagant man!" muttered Mr. Marshall who meant in his heart, "Spendthrift." Then after a moment he called, "Waitress!"

"Eh? She is very pretty."

"Beautiful."

"I think so. I am planning to take her out of the restaurant and set her up in a flat."

"Marry her?"

"Not on your life."

At that moment there entered into the smoking room three Swedish girls, Miss Svenson, Miss Jansen, and Miss Brandes. Behind them came young Ragnar, the brother of the Svenson girl. She was adorable in her youthful vigor and elasticity, and ready in every way to be spouse and mother of heroes—her ruddy hair tight around her head like a helmet; gentle eyes with the steady glance of rustic creatures; skin soft and fresh with the reflection from her native snows. Her figure was

slender without either band or corset. Through her gown showed the fine lines of her form and the slight development of her breasts. One of her most attractive features, which invited kisses and embraces, was the whiteness of her neck and the placing of her golden ringlets, as though done by a fine goldsmith. Altogether Miss Svenson appeared to possess the sweetness of honey and with this honey something indefinable of the bee's sting. To-day, like Ragnar and Miss Brandes, she was wearing the blue and white cap with leather visor that denotes the Swedish student.

Miss Jansen was handsome and majestic, much taller than the Svenson girl and a teacher in the Stockholm high schools. She also was a beauty as soon as she took off her great near-sighted glasses. From her manners it was evident that she exercised some function of authority over the others.

Miss Brandes was built like a great horse: her eyes of dull gray had the astigmatism of a frog. Mr. Coleman, a sporty old Canadian who lived in the hotel, pursued her scandalously in spite of his flabby, bad-tempered wife. On certain evenings he invited the young Swedish lady to play on the violin, which was

his trick to drive out all the other guests by the devilish discords after Mrs. Coleman had gone to bed, so that he might be alone with Miss Brandes. The Canadian in his gossip in the smoking-room asserted that Miss Brandes's conduct was decidedly fast, saying that on repeated occasions she had showed him her legs to tempt him. Ye Gods! what legs! Nobody believed his story!

Ragnar was a bashful youth of striking size and complexion. The expression of an innocent animal was stronger in his eyes than in his sister's. The four in a group came up to Albert. The Svenson girl made a wry face in protest at the thickness of the smoke. Mr. Spofford, a gigantic gorilla who enjoyed a dubious repute on account of the rumor that he was a shady runner for bets at the race-tracks, stood admiring Miss Jansen cynically as they passed him.

"We are now ready, Señor Guzmán," said Miss Jansen.

"Ready, for what?

"For the Tate Gallery."

"Sorry, but to-day I cannot go." And his eyes caressed Miss Svenson, whose displeasure expressed itself in rising color and falling look.

"You don't want to come with us—you prefer to stay here with that polparrot?" She spoke in French so that Mr. Marshall would not understand that he was alluded to by this nickname. He was scratching his shin with perfect unconcern.

"Elin, Elin, don't be rude," protested Miss Jansen.

"No, not at all, Miss Svenson. Nothing could be more agreeable than to go with you to-day." His eyes were telling her. "To go with you alone, but it is impossible."

"What a pity, we can never have his company," declared Miss Jansen.

At this point Mr. Coleman appeared attired in Norfolk jacket and breeches of heavy material, woolen stockings, and pumps or dancing slippers. He was smoking his great calabash pipe and gradually, as if by accident, approaching the group of girls, when suddenly the hippopotamus form of his wife loomed on the scene and the old Canadian beat a hasty retreat.

"But really, are you not coming with us?" begged Miss Svenson. "It gives me such pleasure to hear you talk on art. You see, we can visit the gallery, then have lunch together

and later go to the park, eh?" and trembled at the thought.

Albert could have stood all his life before her, listening to her talk, and studying her graceful little gestures, so distinct from the movements of his Latin people.

The big gorilla came over to the table and with a charming unconcern filled his pipe with Albert's tobacco as though it were a common possession, meanwhile throwing fetching looks at the stately Miss Jansen who could only turn away, saying:

"Some other time, Señor Guzmán. Good-bye. Let us start."

Albert hurried to take the hand of Miss Svenson who pretended to slap him lightly with her other hand, saying:

"Too bad, too bad! I am quite put out with you."

After they had gone Albert closed his eyes as if to retain the vision a little longer. He heard Mr. Marshall whispering mysteriously:

"Which of us two?" he asked, "Her or me?"

And he held up two fingers.

That she was graceful there was no doubt. Albert smiled and closed his eyes. His mood resembled sadness as, in the phrase of Long-

fellow, the mist resembles rain. Miss Svenson reminded him of other women, stars that had wandered across his sentimental pathway, who had been born and had died in the shadows, passing lightly over his heart, whom he had loved a little and by whom he had been loved a little in return, whom he might have come to love deeply and by whom his love might have been as deeply returned. It was a dancing play of possibilities, like the revolutions of a wheel. Perhaps his number had been called for the last time. His thoughts went back to Fina whom he believed he no longer loved, but to whom his mind turned back with surprising frequency.

"The chambermaid, what about her?" asked old Marshall.

When Albert turned to reply to the elder, he found him reddened in the face as if from the exertion of pronouncing so many words in succession and wasting so much breath.

"Nothing more than this, dear Mr. Marshall. To-day at noon I expect final notice. I have suggested that she leave the restaurant. At twelve I shall have a note from her, telling me her decision and appointing where we can meet to-night."

“Foolishness.”

“You have said that twice before.”

“Foolishness,” repeated the old man, redder than ever.

Albert started to laugh.

II

There was the sound of an automobile horn. It must be Bob, thought Albert. Bob it was; he tramped into the smoking room, unbuttoning his fur-overcoat and paying attention to nobody save Albert.

“Come, hurry up now, my friend,” he said joyously in the soft singing voice of the Chilenos.

“But, man, when, where, and why?”

“When? This very minute. Where? My house. Why? Because they are all waiting luncheon for you.”

“It happens, Bob that I cannot go. I am sorry.”

“You cannot go?” and he took Albert and dragged him to his feet. Albert resisted.

“You are a bully. Let me explain how it is.”

“I don’t want any explanations. Nancy,

Meg, and Ben are waiting. Get ready and come along."

They walked over to the elevator.

"To-day at noon I am expecting a most important letter."

"Then leave word to have it sent immediately to our house. Porter," he shouted, "if a letter or important message comes for Señor Guzmán, send it on without delay to this address," and he handed him his card.

"And the letter will probably appoint an hour early in the afternoon to be at a given place."

"You may use my motor then."

"I see there is no way of refusing you."

"Of course, there isn't."

In the upper hallway they passed Marietta, the chambermaid, a Neapolitan of tidy, insinuating ways. She held the corner of her starched white apron, bent her head down under its frilled little cap, lowered her eyes, and, as though she were whispering a love-message in a trance, she sighed:

"Bruta giornata."

"Whiskey and apollinaris," was all Bob's reply." Room forty-five. *Subito.*" "*Subito,*" echoed Marietta's voice in a sad tone from afar.

They entered Albert's room. "I must brush up, Bob."

"All right, but do it quickly." Bob threw his glance over the books on the table. "Books in a bedroom show the spirit of their owner."

"But my spirit as you see is not very expressive."

Bob went over them: a work of philosophy entitled *Human Thought, Its Forms and Problems*, by a Danish author; the *Aesthetics* of Croce and a history of aesthetics by Knight; *Don Quixote*, the *Celestina*, and the *Cortesano*; a treatise on Astrology, another on Alchemy, some critical catalogues of famous picture galleries, and a little book of Sandro Botticelli's paintings. On the small table beside the bed were some copies of *Sol y Sombra* beside an alarm-clock in a leather case and Dickens' *David Copperfield*.

"What have you found out?" asked Albert, his head thrown back as he applied the Gillette razor to his neck.

Bob gave no answer, as he was absorbed in studying himself in the mirror; he smoothed down his pointed blond beard, opened his mouth, and examined his teeth, rattling his nails against them; he turned sideways, pulled

down his vest, threw back his overcoat and jacket to view with a frown the line of his stomach.

"The stomach is the thing that drags us down at last."

He was forty-five years old with an air of youth and vigor. His lower lip hanging loose and heavy gave his expression a heavy touch, which was corrected by the sharp directness of his eyes.

Marietta came in with the whiskey and soda.

"You drink too much, Bob."

"If I drank too much I would not be in the condition I am. I drink what my constitution calls for. Nancy, you know very well, drinks more than I do."

"At any rate," added Albert smiling, "you drink too much."

"Don't you always say, that whatever is, is for the best?"

"Morally, yes. I want to say that we should not judge the acts of others. I don't condemn you, but I would wish you to consider within yourself whether it would not be well to drink less and to make a resolution to that effect."

"Whiskey, whiskey! I don't see why you don't like it?"

"I like old brandy, if you wish."

"That's good too. Let us order a glass."

"I don't drink at this hour. I am ready for you now."

Albert went down the stairs by leaps and bounds, enjoying the softness of the heavy stair-carpet. Bob held on to the bannister. Albert waited for him on the landing.

"You see? Whiskey! Otherwise you would have come down as lightly as I. This is only the commencement."

"Don't talk that way." Bob's lower lip contracted nervously.

They mounted the automobile, a forty-horse Daimler. In Piccadilly Circus they were held up by the thickness of the fog. It was as if they were swept into a river of milk. The chauffeur kept busy with the horn and they heard other horns around them with heavy throaty calls, as they waited in the white clouds. Against the glass of one window there brushed a great formless mass; there was a scratching of metal on the window and the neigh of a horse.

"We've nearly had a collision," grumbled Bob as he lighted the electricity in the car. Albert was smiling. "I know that it is hard for you to lose your nerve."

The thickness lifted in a few minutes. Behind the vapor strange shadows became more and more intense, melting and growing into persons and things. The automobile had been caught in a great tangle of omnibuses, trucks, cabs, and ~~carriages~~ all aiming in divers directions. The policemen went from one side to another waving their clubs trying to re-establish the traffic.

"We are going to be late; Nancy will be impatient," said Bob. "And I have to buy some candy for Meg and a plaything of some sort for Ben. That boy, I can find nothing to amuse him! One can understand, of course, the poor child. He is the last shadow of my life.

"Yes, poor Ben."

They stopped to buy a parlor-gun in a shop and a box of bonbons which Albert insisted on paying for as his offering to Meg. Then the automobile started swiftly on the road to Richmond.

III

Robert Mackenzie and Albert had been friends for only a short time. They had met in a hotel at Biarritz the summer before and from the first moment the Scotsman had shown the Spaniard all the evidences of adoration to which Albert replied with ample loyalty. Bob declared that Albert possessed extraordinary talents and genial qualities, which at first left Albert astonished and embarrassed, then made him laugh, but altogether pleased him secretly without his considering it deeply. Bob kept no secrets from his new friend; he opened to him all the private coffers of the dearest loves and the adventures of his life—a life rapid, uproarious, and, in a way, glorious. By the age of thirty he had enriched himself and been ruined three times; he had dug for gold in California; fished the sea for pearls, gathered rubber in the Andes, diamonds in Kimberley, and dealt in the lion and tiger pelts of the Soudan and India. As his last enterprise had not proved remunerative, he reached Smyrna on his way out of the Orient with very little in his pocket but a store of projects in his head. There he fell in love with a Greek girl,

almost a child, a wandering dancer and seller of oranges whose mother was accustomed to offer her nightly for the sum of ten drachmas while her two elder sisters were sold for five drachmas, and even three on dull days. The dancing girl was called Anita Pyrgos. Bob declared that her mother, after some time had passed, told him that she was the daughter of a Frenchman whose name and address she had forgotten.

Bob and Anita, to whom her lover gave her the English diminutive of Nancy, fled together from Smyrna, beginning a long and wild love affair at the end of which she presented him with a son. His name was Benjamin and he came into the world just as his father had finished the last crumbs of his fortunes. For Bob the son was a stimulus to recapture his lost money in every way. Nancy on the contrary, showed grave disaffection for the child, and, called upon to nurse him at breast, was afraid to risk her figure and with it the love of her husband; so that after a month she refused to nurse him further. Bob submitted to Nancy's will, through the great love he preserved for her. It was a miracle that the child survived. After another year Margarita

was born. By that time Bob and Nancy were established in Chile and their future was bright with the promise of gold.

After ten years of speculations and work in the Chilean salt-mines, Bob, for the fourth time, found himself a millionaire and better-off than ever before. He and Nancy were young and loved each other as at the beginning. They were formally married and made their home in England, buying a house in Richmond and a villa on the side of Mont-Bre on the shores of Lugano.

Meg was a remarkably beautiful child, but Ben had remained stunted and undeveloped.

At the time Albert met the Mackenzies at Biarritz, both Meg and Ben were away at their schools in England.

IV

Meg started to run down the central path of the garden to meet her father and Albert. Nancy remained on the threshold of the conservatory, smiling softly on her husband. She was a woman of fine height, her hair of light shade, about thirty-two years of age, and in

the fullness of her feminine beauty, with a patrician ease in her bearing that reminded one of the Roman sculptures of Fortitude.

After kissing Bob and Albert, Meg swung herself between them on their arms, raising her legs so as to be carried in the air. She was fifteen years old, but her development was so backward that she behaved as if only ten; at times she became noisy or took advantage of older people, particularly of Doña Laura, her governess. She wore a blue apron designed after a Byzantine dalmatic, and a white frock of fine batiste trimmed with embroidery. Her stockings were of silk and her slippers suede. Her hair was of pure gold rippling copiously as though it were liquid and swelling into heavy curls. She had her mother's eyes of green and a complexion that might be called angelical.

"Meg, my darling, you must not bother Albert," said her father gently.

"No, no," she replied. "Really, I don't bother you, do I, Señor de Guzmán?"

"No, dear, no. But I wish you would call me Albert."

"Ah, pardon me; but I always forget."

"And that you be familiar with me."

"Albert is right," said Bob.

"Yes, I know, dear papa. But he is so formal a gentleman; I shall try," she sighed, "but I shall have to make an effort."

Albert and Bob smiled over her comic desolation. Nancy saluted Albert in an affectionate, quiet manner and turned to Bob and gave him her lips to kiss. They joined their mouths glutonously and prolonged the caress noticeably. Meg watched them attentively as she always did when they kissed.

"And Ben? I have brought him a rifle."

"I don't know, Bobby; he must be hiding in some corner as usual. What an awful child!" exclaimed Nancy with an impatient gesture.

"Meg, you go and get him," said the father.

"Let the servants bring him," answered Meg pertly. "He is a disagreeable brute."

"Meg dear, he is your brother."

"It doesn't seem so," she replied, returning to her ordinary tone of voice.

Albert looked at Meg, sorrowfully wondering with fear that so beautiful a body might develop an evil soul.

"Meg, run up to Doña Laura and have her comb your hair for luncheon."

"Doña Laura is too slow; I shall go and brush it myself."

She disappeared, singing like a winged creature that does not touch the earth. Nancy turned to her husband confidentially:

"Bobby, that boy is growing into a positive torment. Since you went out, Doña Laura has come to complain to me that he has attacked her."

"Has he said anything offensive or serious?"

"No, no; he has conducted himself in an ungentlemanly manner, and he is now seventeen years old."

"Hush, Nancy. This poor woman may be oversensitive."

"Yes," continued Nancy with intensity, "it is all very well for you to pity him. But how about us, Bobby? Do you wish me to ask why our son should be this way? Even to run out and misbehave himself on the street?"

"Is it altogether his fault, Nancy?"

"But is it our fault, Bobby?"

Bob did not hazard a reply. He looked anxiously through the greens of the conservatory to discover the hiding-place of the poor defective. They went into the large dining hall furnished in Italian walnut carved in Renais-

sance style. All were at the table before Ben made his appearance. He turned directly to his seat especially heaped up with cushions on account of his shortness; his father called to him:

“Come and let me kiss you. I have brought you a rifle; it is in the conservatory. Do you wish to see it before your luncheon?”

“I’ll see it soon enough,” answered Ben, without manifesting the slightest interest in the gift. His voice was weak and harsh.

He sat down between Doña Laura and Albert. Doña Laura drew her seat away with noisy dread as if in fear of a public violation. Ben rolled his angry eyes on her. His head was flattened on the sides; his profile showed his face stuck out like the prow of a ship; his ears hung back high, loose, and pointed; his arms and hands were large like tentacles, his face was of the color of dry straw; his eyes shone with a penetrating, ominous light. He formed a contrasting note among this group of handsome, healthy people. It was easy to see that he was equally hurt by the open dislike of his mother and sister and the public excessive compassion of his father. Albert tried to treat him with absolute naturalness, so as

to give him to understand that his deformity was an accident frequent among men upon which nobody laid great importance. He forced himself to this attitude as he could not deny the pity he actually felt. Ben divined that he had a good friend in Albert and had more affection for him than he dared to show before his family. If he had realized that Albert had more affection for him than for the rest of the family, he would have been very happy. When he happened to look at his sister or even his mother or father, there seemed to come a poisoned fluid into his eyes as if he would annihilate the beauty of their faces.

"You don't doubt, really, Albert, that I love you dearly?" said Bob.

"I don't doubt it."

"Then through the fondness I have for you, would you like to know what I most desire for you?"

"Let me hear it."

"That you should be left without a cent in the world."

"What wild talk, Bobby!" exclaimed Nancy.

"Not so wild."

"Please explain, then."

"So that you would then be obliged to work."

"To write, you mean."

"He constantly says so," said Nancy. "He says you should write more."

"As I know, he won't write unless he is forced."

"That is so; ruin me and leave me to make my living on writing in Spain where nobody has been able to gain a livelihood that way from the days of Cervantes until now."

"Come now, friend, look at——"

"Don't mention any names. One by one that you mention, I can assure you, will tell you the same as I."

"But I insist."

"Bobby, don't insist."

Nancy's face was slightly clouded and after a pause Bob continued:

"Nancy is superstitious," he tried to smile; he was still pensive. Then:

"And I also. Perhaps I have talked foolishly."

Albert took up the theme lightly:

"Let us suppose I am left without a cent. Well, what happens to me?"

"This, that when you will wish to marry, the girls will laugh at your suit, Señor Guzmán," answered Meg.

"But why?" asked Ben in a dry voice.

Meg turned warmly at her mother.

"He is always ready to pick on me."

"Is it," continued Ben in the same excited manner, "that girls are always looking for the rich and the good-looking?"

"Yes, boy, that's why so many are going to fall in love with you."

Ben's red face seemed to sink deeper into his hollow shoulders. "And why not, Meg?" Albert spoke softly as he gave Ben's hand a slight squeeze which made the boy radiant.

Bob and Nancy ate and drank copiously. As the luncheon went on their cheeks glowed more and more and in their eyes they sought each other with desire.

They all went out to take their coffee in a little Louis XV salon. There was a bottle of very old brandy for Albert. Husband and wife devoted themselves to whiskey. They attempted conversation, tried to laugh and show themselves sociable, but the seriousness of their passion was too much for them. Bob drew Nancy to his breast and she only weakly

resisted more from coquetry than modesty. This was the usual after-luncheon scene and Albert expected it ever since he knew them, but before the children he felt embarrassed and confused. When Bob and Nancy had left the room, he was more at ease with Meg and Ben. They went into the conservatory to try the rifle. The cripple could not make a decent shot, while Meg struck the bull's-eye with apparent ease. After succeeding several times, she wearied of the sport.

"Bah!" she exclaimed with a scornful face, "there is no fun in it, I don't know how men can amuse themselves with such things."

She seized hold of Pussy, an ashen-colored Angora which lay asleep on a couch; she kissed it, embraced it, whispering tender names, sighing and making eyes at it. She was engaged at this for some time when the animal began to show its weariness and bad humor.

"Ungrateful wretch; I don't love you, no, I don't love you. Come ask for a kiss and that will be all."

She put it on the floor and turned it on its back, but drawing back and crouching down with her arms folded at some distance off, she said caressingly:

"No, pet; do not believe me; I love you. Come to your Meg; puss, puss." The cat began to approach step by step, its tail trailing on the floor. As it appeared Meg moved away, keeping her crouched position and cracking her fingers. Pussy in all his seriousness made a stop between Ben and the target.

"Please take that beast out of here," he said dryly.

Meg continued as if she did not hear and the cat insolently kept its position resisting the blandishments of its mistress, saying no with its stiffened tail. When it was most involved in its symbolic eloquence the toe of the cripple hurled it into the air with such violence that it struck the crystal chandelier and then fled away. Meg was then the cat. In fury she fell upon her brother with nails and fists. Albert was in time to prevent injuries. With one hand he held Ben back, with the other, fearless of the rifle with which she was threatened, Meg, who struggled to free herself and kick the poor ankles of the boy.

At this point Bob and Nancy returned smiling. The mother's natural inclination was to turn on Ben without asking questions with the obvious intention to strike him, which

Albert prevented. Bob lifted the girl in his arms as she whimpered and wept in rage. Explanations were beginning when a servant appeared at the door with a tray holding a telegram and a letter for Señor Guzmán.

"A telegram," muttured Albert to himself. "Who could have any reason to telegraph me? And marked urgent."

There was a moment of suspense. The children were instantly calmed; they looked at Albert as something mysterious. He read the telegram twice. He read the address on the letter without troubling to open it.

"Why don't you read the letter?" asked Bob in concern.

"Why should I?"

"Explain this riddle to us," begged Nancy.

Albert smiled and then spoke slowly:

"If the telegram didn't come from Spain, I should say it was a joke of Bob's."

"A joke of mine?"

"It reads: 'Hurtado flown. Deposits disappeared. Terrible bankruptcy. Urge coming on first train, Jiménez.' Then after a pause: 'Hurtado is my banker.'

Bob and Nancy did not know what to say.

"One would think you were the guilty ones,"

continued Albert without losing his smile. "The thing is probably not half so serious as my friend makes out in his telegram. And if it is, be glad, thou man of God, who now may start out with his: 'I shall write.' "

"Soon," Nancy hesitated as she spoke, "you will not believe that Bob could say it—not only could say it, but desire it. What a strange happening!"

"How could I have desired it? I was only joking. But after all Guzmán knows that my money is at his disposal," he added vehemently.

"Let us not waste time over foolishness. Bob spoke at half-past twelve and the telegram was sent at ten o'clock. So—as a coincidence, it is certainly curious. And now I shall say good-bye to you until—until the next time."

Bob offered to go with him in the automobile, On the way he asked:

"Had you all your money with this banker?"

"Yes, all my little principal, besides what I have been living on. I had a house in Pilares whose furnishings I sold, as I had no intention of returning for some years. I also had a country-place which I recently sold, to whom do you think? To an old servant of mine. I gave him the money to establish a business and

he prospered quickly. Even if the banker carried off all that I deposited with him, there remain some ten thousand pesetas which I lent to Manolo, that is the name of my servant. So you see I am not actually penniless."

"I see that; I too have been without money, not once but several times. But tell me, man alive, how the devil could you choose a banker of such little character?"

"He was the brother-in-law of the girl who was my fiancée. He seemed entirely honest and clever in the give-and-take of business. I shall soon learn just what has happened."

"Don't neglect to write to me."

"Wait; I may not have enough money for the voyage. Let me count—ten pounds."

"How much do you need?"

"Nothing more; with these ten pounds I can make the voyage third-class."

"Your hotel charges?"

"Enough. I shall soon see what I require."

Bob parted with Albert only when the train started. Just before he got aboard they embraced:

"Don't forget us, Guzmán," murmured the Scotsman in emotion.

V

It was half-past six in the morning when Jiménez and Alfonso del Marmol passed through the platform of the station to meet the incoming express. The day had not yet dawned and the two friends went along in silence except for the sound of their steps on the flagged pavement. Jiménez wore a cap pulled down on his ears; Marmol had the collar of his fur coat raised to the brim of his derby so that only from the front could one catch a glimpse of his sharp nose and the large, choice Henry Clay stuck between his lips. Except for the employees of the railroad, they were the sole living beings about the station, that is, if one did not count the cow imprisoned in a side-car, and mooing listlessly as it sent periodic puffs of its white breath through the bars of the ventilator. Through the darkness shone two lamps, a red and a green; the whistle sounded some distance off and in a short time the train appeared and dashed into the station, shaking the windows as it stopped. It consisted of three coaches with a platform railed around the top.

Jiménez and Marmol waited to see Albert appear; but no window was opened.

"Albert! Guzmán," shouted Jiménez with that heavy voice of his that caused such commotion where silence was to be maintained. "Could he be sleeping when they came in?"

The windows remained dark and closed. Jiménez and Marmol got aboard the train and went from coach to coach, turning on the lights and receiving the angry looks and grunts of the voyagers awakened from the charming brainlessness of their slumbers by the sudden apparition of the two.

"Here he is," declared Marmol triumphantly as he shook Albert, who stretched out the back of his hands like a child.

"Eh?" he asked half asleep. Then becoming conscious: "Marmol? Jiménez? Are we in Pilares?"

"No, in Dreamland," answered Marmol through his cigar. "And you in your slippers with your valises undone and the train here for only six minutes. Out with you just as you are! In the station we shall pack everything properly."

Albert threw on a loose overcoat and between the three they gathered his things in a

head and bundled him out of the train just as it started away. Jiménez, the jocose and festive Jiménez, for whom there could occur no occasion to blight his humorous fancy and acrobatic tendency, now stood motionless and almost funereal. Marmol, whose friends were accustomed to call him Marmorillo on account of his general frigidity and because they never caught him laughing outwardly since he had learned to laugh within, now showed himself stirred by contradictory desires to go here and there and everywhere quite alien to his boreal nature in general. He wished to take Albert in his automobile to the hotel. Albert refused; he preferred to shake his legs in walking. They left the station. The skies were clearing and a man down the street before them was extinguishing the lights. Above the line of rooftops, like the broken profile of a ruined wall, rose the Gothic shadow of the cathedral, bending over like a cypress.

Albert had no wish to ask questions, worried perhaps that he was going to hear what he feared. Jiménez did not dare to speak. Marmol kept up the conversation, retailing the news of Pilares since his absence, but not risking a reference to the principal subject of

their concern. It was day when they reached the hotel. Albert tried to get rid of them, but the two had come with the resolve to inform him at any cost of all that had happened. All three sat down, Albert on the side of the bed, as Marmol took up the narrative.

Telesforo Hurtado, it seemed, shortly after marrying Leonor Tramontana, had taken possession of the bank through the retirement of his chief and with the aid of Don Medardo's millions of pesetas. How the business went nobody could say with certainty; some said well, others said badly. One thing was sure, Hurtado carried on a loose and prodigal career, changing his sweethearts, automobiles, jewels, and habits with such frequency that all Pilares was on its ears. It happened that in one of the cafés in Madrid he discovered a French burlesque singer, Manon Orette. Here Jiménez interrupted:

“Whoop-la for Orette! The filthy tricks she played—” And he swallowed a great volume of atmosphere. He then recovered his strength and the free play of his faculties.

On the arrival of Manon Orette, Hurtado changed his general line of action with the ladies; from the temporary he passed to the

permanent. In regard to his other exchanges he reduced himself to only those approved by his Manon. These abominable relations of the dancer and the banker continued for two months to the great scandal of the pure-in-heart and again Jiménez interrupted:

"With most public knowledge of every intimate detail," and with the index finger of his right hand he drew down his eyelid on that side. Then with an accent of utmost irritation he said: "*Contra naturam!*" and gathering up his mouth he emitted several times a wild whoop of eschatological character, all the time maintaining his usual gravity. Albert could not contain his laughter. Marmol, after his inside laughter had subsided, went on with the story.

One day Hurtado started to speculate on the bourse in Madrid, where he was known to go every fortnight. After five days his book-keeper received a note from him dated at Harvre, asking him kindly to inform his numerous friends and clients that he thanked them for the simplicity and stupidity that they had shown him and wishing them adieu. Such a catastrophe had not happened in Pilares in twenty years. From the first inquiries it transpired that Hurtado had taken all the

funds in deposit and in trust and opened accounts with the Bank of Spain, hypothesizing them, some four millions pesetas all told, and losing everything, with the guaranty of his losses in the hands of the Bank. That is to say, there was not a penny that he failed to carry off. What had he done with the money? Had he spent it? Did he take it with him? Probably one and the other.

Albert listened till the end, without indignation or discouragement.

"All my money was in the hands of Hurtado. Briefly, what is left?"

"Honestly, I don't believe a single cent—nothing," declared Marmol.

"However," said Jiménez, "some people think——"

"There are some who think that they will get back ten per cent of their account after a legal proceeding that may require from four to forty years. I don't think Albert need put much trust in that."

Albert signed a cross in the air to signify that everything was over. He tried to smile and to be naturally at ease with his friends, to let them understand that he was a man proof against these stings of misfortune; but his heart

beat restlessly and his thoughts were too confused for him to talk effectively.

"Who would have said it? He seemed an intelligent fellow in all his dealings," Albert muttered this in low tones, his head upon his breast.

"Intelligent—bah! He could pass for clever in ordinary matters. But honorable? I always said he was a rogue and would end badly," said Marmol, contemplating stoically the minute proportions to which his cigar was reduced, as though it was an emblem of the fragility of all human greatness.

The painful silence was then broken by Marmol.

"What do you think you will do?"

"Whatever I can, Alfonso."

"You needn't trouble about that," was the opinion of Jiménez. "There will always be a few thousand a year for Guzmán in whatever he undertakes."

Jiménez knew very well that these opportunities were as rare as the golden fleece or the transmutation of metals. After another silence Marmol asked Albert:

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"Why don't you marry?"

Marmol would have liked to say, Why don't you marry Fina.

"This is a fine occasion. Just now I am a most eligible *parti*," replied Albert, without hiding his discontent.

"This is just the time to discover whether the affection one shows you is worth anything."

"It might be if it were not for my sense of dignity. Besides, you seem to think that all that is necessary for me to do is to present myself and say, Here I am and that is all."

"Exactly," insisted Marmol. "No more or less, and I know people as well as anybody on earth. And even if I have never spoken a word with her in my life."

"Only from seeing her. I have been hoping for it and I still look forward to it."

Albert could not trust his voice to make a reply.

"Let us give him a chance to rest. We shall come back after eating."

"No, don't come back. I shall go direct to Cenciella. I need to examine my conscience and to arrange my plan of life. There is nothing like the country for that."

"To Cenciella, very well. But where, what

part, what residence?" asked Marmol, dropping his eyelids peculiarly.

"What part? To my house, of course—that is to say, to Manolo's house which is the same thing."

"The house of Don Manuel Carruejano, alias Tarragañon, the famous orator, pillar of social order and lieutenant-Alcalde of Cen-ciella."

"Is it possible!" Albert showed a pleasant surprise. "How he has thrived! I am glad of it."

They said good-bye. Once alone Albert threw himself on the bed face-downward, his hands supporting his forehead. He had no desire to think of anything.

VI

Don Celso Robles was a bachelor of some sixty years, a sworn enemy of the more beau-tous part of the human species, a devotée to eating and drinking and those blesséd card parties of ombre, which is also called *tresillo*. The style of Don Celso's corporal architecture

might be called Cyclopean; his legs were two monolithic columns; his stomach like a primitive temple raised to some cruel divinity where victims snatched from their elements of air, earth, and water were daily offered up with an on-pouring of liquids and Bacchic sedatives. The dome of this temple was a tricolor cupola decorated in parallel bars; the first bar was the white collar of his shirt; higher up the smiling rounded face with its eyes and cheeks as red and spongy as the comb of a rooster; the great mouth gloating over the sacrifices of the day, the sides of the lips falling down over the chin; the nose, ears, and back of the neck turning from red to indigo-blue; the bald head of brownish vermillion with metallic irridations like a decoration in old Moorish tiles. Pathologically speaking, Señor Robles was of the apoplectic, congestive order. His physician had suggested the possibility of his blowing up some day and recommended a change in his vegetative habits and that he should give up business and retire into the country. The very notion that the insatiable divinity lodged behind his belly should suffer a diminution of his sacrifices tortured the most delicate fibres of Don Celso's heart. He wished to give up his

bank, but could find nobody ready to take up the business. Then one day Telesforo Hurtado communicated his plans to him and Don Celso listened with great interest, advising him to marry before undertaking the responsibility, in spite of all his enmity for the daughters of Eve. On his marriage, the firm became "Telesforo Hurtado and Company." Señor Robles made no difficulty about leaving a good part of his principal at that time in circulation and satisfied himself with an annuity of fifty thousand pesetas. He bought a house in the country, gathered together three old friends in misfortune to make up his parties of *tresillo*, and turning over a new page in his life he attempted to change into a rustic rite the city habits of his stomach. On leaving Hurtado he dropped some germs of his pessimism:

"You have apparently made a good marriage, Telesforo; but my experience in the world obliges me to warn you to be upon your guard. With the women, my friend, one must be ever watchful, ever alert with the sentinel's gun in hand, even if the devil is not in them." He did believe that the devil possessed them. "And now, go on in business, as by all accounts you do; I wish you prosperity."

The house was run under the auspices of Hurtado who took on the airs of grand seigneur. The noisy ostentation of his jewels and the arrival of his first automobile rather bothered Don Medardo who took his son-in-law aside for some observations. Hurtado replied to these:

"The big fish bring the little fish, and big fish and little are caught with bait on the hook. A banking house thrives, or thrives principally, only by keeping in circulation the moneys confided to it. To be rich is not so important as to appear rich. Do you think that a banker who lived in beggarly fashion would inspire his clients and others with any confidence?"

"To my way of thinking, yes; with more confidence than any extravagance would."

"Bah, that's the way of all business in Spain, and you see the results. Old-fashioned ways, that's all, Don Medardo," and speaking in this fashion he led the old man to the desk of the bookkeeper. "Show Don Medardo the increase in deposits and the running accounts since I took over the bank."

The increase had been considerable. Don Medardo was convinced.

"You are right; I am very old-fashioned."

"The automobile and the diamonds. Do you think I care for such things? No, dear Don Medardo, the bait, the bait. Little by little we are getting the depositors from the other houses, for instance, from that Meumiret across the way. The bait, the bait."

"I don't like to hear you talk that way, Telesforo. You use such language—the bait—it seems as though you intended to cheat people."

"Another old-fashioned notion; for what are merchants except people who cheat one another? What did you yourself do in Havana except take advantage of other folk?"

"You astonish me. What you say about taking advantage—" Don Medardo thought for a moment. "Well then, put it this way: that good opinion which people feel for you, does it not add to your responsibility to see that you in no way compromise their interests with your extravagances?"

Telesforo asserted himself:

"Have you then any fear for your money?"

"For heaven's sake, Telesforo, don't speak of my money. I trust you fully."

"As for the others, don't bother about them; they shall have dollar for dollar. Do you know

how much I have made in each of these operations of buying and selling? Three thousand pesetas. Yes, Señor. You can see the books and be convinced."

There was no such thing in the books, but Telesforo was sure that Tramontana would answer as he did:

"It is enough to hear you say so." And then thoughtfully: "You are certainly a smart one."

Another thing that put terror into Don Medardo's bones was Telesforo's traffic on the Bourse. The old man had the archaic notion that riches are something solid and permanent, like money, houses, and land. The idea of permanence was fundamental. Capital was piled up like a building, stone by stone. He had always laughed at those fortunes that rose like airy phantoms by a sort of enchantment and dissipated into thin air. Money exchange filled him with fear; it was to fortunes what lightning was to houses; it reduced them instantly to nothing. But the clever Hurtado took good care to involve his father-in-law in tangled arguments, and to enlighten him with such flagrant illustrations that before the year

was over the old man was convinced that Hurtado was one of the financial leaders of the century.

It so happened that during one of their evenings at home Aunt Anastasia, suppressing the ironic smile which she had maintained from her first sight of Telesforo, had the hardihood to make the traitorous suggestion that Hurtado gave her a pain in the side. Don Medardo turned to repress this boldness in his maternal aunt with the sharp phrase: "Anastasia, your head has always been hermetically closed to the sun and the breeze." Aunt Anastasia, in spite of her humility, was stubborn enough to insist that even if Hurtado might be a cherub descended from the heavens, as far as she was concerned (and there was no way out of it), he gave her a decided pain; the smile that accompanied this was decidedly acid.

"Anastasia," repeated Don Medardo, with a finality that indicated the end of the discussion, "your head is as thick as a stone wall."

So it was that Telesforo remained the king's anointed with the master on the first floor of the house. Leonor and he occupied the second story; she was happy, adored her husband who had fruitfully given her a little blessing in the

way of a brown baby with all the earmarks of a Kalmuck, a diabolical disposition, and a very primitive notion of the regulations of digestion and hygiene. Nevertheless, the Tramontana family considered him the type and norm of infantile beauty, found him charming in his spasms, and saw precocious intelligence in his Kalmuck stupidity. Even Aunt Anastasia, in spite of her painful impressions of the father, felt a boundless enthusiasm over the merits of the son.

“I am afraid for the little rascal.” She did not wish to assert that his ugliness frightened her as it really did, but that his very intelligence threatened to overtax his forces, paraphrasing unintentionally the saying of Menander, “Whom the gods love die young.” She would add: “If he could only speak!”—something of which the child apparently took no account, as he evidently lacked the necessary language.

Whispers of Telesforo’s intrigues at last reached the Tramontana household and penetrated even to the second story. The judgment of the family was sufficiently lenient; they had excused the extravagant adventures of his youth, in consideration of the fact that Leonor

was then nursing at breast the baby Telin and according to the opinion of Don Medardo, which greatly surprised his wife, there was a certain incontinence or persistence which powerfully influenced the masculine sex. Don Medardo delivered himself of this with many circumlocutions, always careful that Fina was not in the room:

"Man is weak," and he would cross one leg over the other as his bones made a cracking sound. "I, as a young fellow, a man like all the others, suffered from this same infirmity, or if you insist, incontinence or passion. Some are subject in their bachelor days, others after marriage."

"And others both before and after marriage," added Aunt Anastasia.

"Anastasia," protested Don Medardo, "you must show more tolerance for human weakness. What do you know about this anyhow?"

The effect on the second floor was different; the messenger of the bad tidings came through the industry of Leonor's hairdresser. While she took down the señora's back hair, anointed it, and bound it over a topknot of the false hair of some anonymous corpse, this devilish female would proceed to fill Leonor's heart

with poisonous revelations. At last the unhappy woman let out so heavy a groan that the hairdresser thought she had pulled out some of her tresses. No, the sorrow was more profound. The hairdresser gave up her client for the day and left Leonor abandoned to misfortune lying on the sofa in desolation, but careful not to injure the fine coverings. On Telesforo's return, there was a fine dramatic scene. The martyr spouse took the attitude of Christian submission and acceptance of the will of Providence. No reproaches, threats, or furies. She confessed the fear that her milk had failed and that the little Kalmuck would thereafter have to depend on his nourishment from other sources, however adulterated. Telesforo tried tenderly to contradict the gossip and showed great concern over the bad omens regarding the baby's milk. He confessed with some shame that on certain occasions he had shown himself in public with beautiful women. But he added in justification that always he had been obliged by circumstances, either business considerations, or the pursuit of the fair ones—although it had never happened—on his word as a gentleman—that he had been unfaithful to his marriage vows.

It was so natural that women should pursue her Telesforo because of his handsome Tartar face and shining skin. After this they might tell all the stories they wished to Leonor. She smiled to herself; she was in the secret. Her father would sometimes say to her:

"Don't pay any attention to these poisoned tongues, my child."

"You speak very wisely, Papa."

As Hurtado was very gentle and discreet in his domestic relations, Leonor confided in him absolutely as in a treasure that others envied her. So it happened that Telesforo took his flight across the sea without so much as a word of good-bye for her or the little Kalmuck.

VII

The flight of Hurtado was announced in Don Medardo's house within a half hour after the bookkeeper had received the fatal letter. Nobody could have been better than he to carry the news to Tramontana, but at the very moment of the discovery, arrived Carriles the broker, a frank imperturbable man who was considered providential for the purpose. He

was an enthusiastic student of the human heart and delighted in observing the faces of persons hearing news that damaged them. He had a glance so cold that when he looked at you your blood froze up in your veins. He lent himself ardently to the task, and started out in a coach to see that Don Medardo should be cured of the ignorance in which he had been living. He counted on a pathetic scene, but his heart was hardened to anything that could happen.

Don Medardo was warming himself beside the hearth, holding his stockinged feet to the warmth. His slippers of black velvet embroidered in blue forget-me-nots by the hand of his filial Leonor lay near by on a chair.

“Won’t you sit down, Carriles, and let us hear what brings you to the house. Permit me to keep my slippers off; otherwise I shall never be able to get the chill out of my feet.”

Carriles laid out an elaborate exordium, full of striking, warning phrases.

“Come to the point, friend Carriles.”

Carriles, seeing the time had come, not only delivered the point, but shot a whole volley with his eyes fixed closely on Don Medardo’s face. Don Medardo neither blinked nor opened his mouth nor stirred a muscle. He

continued with perfect equanimity rubbing his left foot which seemed particularly refractory to the heat waves. Carriles felt himself cheated. He added in cavernous tones:

“A great catastrophe!”

“Is that all, friend Carriles?”

Carriles delivered himself of a gesture which was intended to say, Is that the way it strikes you! and took his leave, Don Medardo excusing himself from going to the door on account of the abominable chill in his feet. The enthusiastic student of the human soul departed, quite convinced that Don Medardo was without a heart. Once alone the old man called his wife. He wished to consult with her on the kindest way to break the news to Leonor; that was the one thought in his mind. Down in his simple heart he had the proud satisfaction and intellectual vanity of realizing that his own financial system was not so old-fashioned as it was called. As a matter of fact, he could hardly realize that Telesforo had really fled as a criminal after a robbery. He fancied he had met his ruin in good faith and had hurried away in shame. Neither he nor Doña Dolores thought for a moment of the hundred thousand or so cut out of their principal. They worried

only how Leonor would receive the bad news and its effects on the future of the little Kal-muck. Discussing the matter carefully, they resolved that Fina should make the sad revelation to her sister. They called her and she responded in company with Aunt Anastasia. Don Medardo told all in a few words. Anastasia met the situation with a contentment a hundred times that of Don Medardo; she lifted up her hands and exclaimed:

“Didn’t I tell you he gave me that bad pain in my side?” There was an air of triumph about her. She showed her satisfaction so markedly that Don Medardo remarked in surprise:

“One would say that you were glad, Anastasia!”

“You are right, Medardo. God forgive me,” she sighed, repentant for having been carried away by a spontaneous movement. “How could I have been glad? Poor Leonor. God forgive me!”

“God forgive us both,” whispered Fina. For after all, she also felt some satisfaction in the misfortune, seeing in it new beginnings. Albert would now have to return to Pilares to take up his life there.

Fina went upstairs to perform her hard task. At that moment the mother was bathing the Kalmuck, who had reached such a point of rage that from olive he had turned to the color of egg-plant, and never ceased for an instant to protest his fury and feline rage as the water and powders were applied to him. They dried him, swathed him, and soothed him until they brought back his composure and the little Kalmuck, with the attitude of a wild thing, turned back into sleep.

Fina conducted herself with such serene tact that when she had finished speaking Leonor remained silent and lost in thought. Then the big tears began to fall and Fina embraced her in silence. After a while Leonor grew calmer. She had formed an opinion of the affair that was characteristic of her in conformity with her illusions. Telesforo had always loved her so much; therefore, however bad his fortunes were going, he had never desired to trouble her with his desperation.

“Don’t you think so, Josefina?”

Josefina saw how preposterous the supposition was, but nevertheless assented to it.

“Telesforo was always a child. For some time I have noticed his preoccupation and in

secret he confided that he had business cares. Ah, poor Teles! Why didn't he go to Papa? He would surely have helped him. What he must have suffered, thinking of me and his little one over whom he was so crazy!"

Leonor went over and kissed the little Kalmuck.

"Be calmer, Leonor. You will only wake him up."

Leonor came over and sat in a low chair, her elbows on her knees, her face in her hands. When she lifted her head, her eyes shone brightly.

"Fina, I am sure that in a short time Telesforo will make a fortune in America and will return and settle up everything. Poor darling, how you must suffer without your Leonor, without daring even to write to her! But you will see, Fina, that in a few days I shall have a letter from him, poor foolish boy, to have run away from counsel and support! I am not going to pardon him." She tried to smile, but broke into tears. "At any rate, Fina, I am very unhappy!"

Then she thought of her old father.

"Tell him that I don't wish him to worry or fret; I am the person most affected and you see

how calm I am. I trust in God and patience. I don't wish the dear old man to suffer on my account. I shall go down myself a little later. When I do, I promise to be calm as you shall see. And Mama also; ask her not to cry. They must be suffering; go down to them, go down, Fina."

VIII

The distance from the station of Cenciella to the town is about a kilometer. Ordinarily, travelers follow the line of the carbon tracks, cross the railroad and run over to the residential quarter; it is a gloomy avenue, covered with carbon dust, outlined by a row of ancient poplar trees. Albert preferred to cut across the fields, through meadows, woods, and furrows of red earth. It was late in the afternoon of a fine sunny day. Of old, when he owned the place, he was accustomed to enter quietly through the keeper's house; now he wished to enter by the front gate which stood partly open. He seemed thus to be establishing a new kind of dominion, of sentimental empire. This house should always be his—his

alone, for it alone possessed the power to evoke his old latent force and interpret his expression of poetic tenderness. He drew up before the façade; the edifice seemed sad to see him return; the balconies looked like haughty eyes; the hollow of the door, like a stupefied mouth. The roses along the wall appeared to tremble with their emotion. Albert ran through the entrance and up the steps three at a time, calling:

“Manolo! Manolo!”

On the upper landing from two doors appeared Teresuca and Manolo in shirt-sleeves with a jacket in his hands. The moment and circumstances brought back the past to Albert’s mind. One would have said that Manolo was discovered in the act of brushing his master’s coat.

“The young master!” exclaimed Teresuca.

“Don Albert!” added Manolo, as though to correct and reproach her.

Albert embraced Manolo with much affection. He congratulated him on his prosperity and welcomed him as a friend in his consideration. He then turned to Teresuca and took her hand cordially.

“How are you, my good Teresuca?”

"I did not know that you two were so intimate," remarked Manolo, with some malignity as he put on the jacket. He then said: "We have heard of your misfortune. Will you come in?"

Albert reddened a little. In these few minutes he seemed to be clearer in his impressions, saying at last to Teresuca:

"Is Manolo jealous?"

"He has reason to be jealous."

By the tone of this, Albert gathered the fact of the desolate estrangement of the two spouses. Sad and depressed, he advanced into the house.

"This way; no, that is my office. Enter the salon. Please be seated. Can't I offer you something?"

"Thanks, I don't desire anything."

"And where do you intend to go?"

"I don't go, Manolo; I come to my own house. Don't make that gesture; to your house, if you prefer. I desire to pass a while in your company until I can determine what course to take. Don't speak, no." Manolo lowered his eyes. "I see what you are about to say to me. Never could I have imagined such ingratitude!"

"Don't speak to me about ingratitude; it has nothing to do with the case."

"Ingratitude, I tell you. You are a despicable fellow," said Albert rising to his feet.

"Teresuca, do me the favor of going out into the fresh air."

Teresuca went out slowly, casting amiable glances at Albert.

"I don't suppose that you have come into the sacred privacy of my home to hurl insults into my face." Albert did not know whether to laugh at his servant's pomposity of speech or to spit on him and leave him. "All the world is ruled on the principle of offer and demand, of give and take. *Do ut des*, as the Evangelist says. I wish to say that this is the Gospel. If I—"

Albert had a sudden idea. Manolo went on:

"If I was once a servant and have known like Rousseau to raise myself to the top of the ladder; if from the humble sea of want I have sailed into port, not, I shall say, of abundance but of modest competence which some would call parsimony; if from the books that you despised I have made the shoes of my soul; finally, if I have passed from the cocoon to the butterfly that soars the air, I fail to see that

it is cause for gratitude. I don't owe you a thing!"

Albert sprang and grabbed him by the throat.

"You owe me nine thousand five hundred pesetas, without counting the interest."

"If you will drop this familiar tone which dates from an unhappy period of my career, we shall get along better."

"You owe me nine thousand five hundred pesetas, which you will pay me in the space of one day, if you do not wish me to appeal to the courts."

"The sum you mention I have had the satisfaction to pay in the banking house of Don Telesforo Hurtado, of execrable memory, very shortly after you lent it to me. That, as well as the interest."

Albert read the falsehood in Manolo's eyes.

"You are a liar. Where then is your acknowledgment?"

Manolo stammered. He recovered himself and spoke with insolence:

"And where is the acknowledgment to prove that I ever received it from your hands?"

"Ah," shouted Albert in triumph. "At last

you have the effrontery to confess that you are a scoundrel!"

"I confess no such thing."

"Yes, man, yes. That I did not exact an acknowledgment in lending you the money? You do well in not returning it. A clear proof of my simplicity in trusting your rascality and not in your honesty. You are as big a fool as ever was; and it astonishes me to see that you have been able to profit with it."

This severe judgment on his mental equipment rather staggered Manolo. He resolved to end the conversation.

"No more about the water that has passed. I must now leave you to go to Sotiello, to the house of my friend the Señor Marquis of Espinella, with whom——"

"Look you here, fellow," concluded Albert, pushing on his hat, "I have called you a scoundrel several times, but that is not the proper name for you; the real name for you is Jackass!"

At the outer door he shouted three or four times the name, "Jackass! Jackass!"

IX

Albert rested in the tavern of Librada, drinking cider while the proprietress bemoaned his misfortunes, cursed the pride and dishonesty of Manolo, alias Taragañon, recalling the memory of her old friend Rufa, dead shortly after selling her house and casting doubts on the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, repeating, "This world has no justice, Don Albertin, no justice." It would be an hour before the train started back to Pilares.

In the doorway of the hut appeared one of the villagers; her cheeks showed a redness excessive for the human complexion, her hair a black ooze like a coal-pit, so that her face seemed to be in a sort of conflagration.

"That is Pepona, the *Arrecachada*," explained Librada.

The woman caught sight of Albert and began to make extravagant signs at him as if she wished to ridicule him.

"She is crazy?" he asked Librada. "She is not of my time here, as I have no recollection of her."

"She is servant at Taragañon's house."

The woman continued with her signs, shak-

ing her head so violently that the flames in her face threatened to communicate themselves through the rest of her body.

"What in mischief is the matter with you, *Arrecachada?*" called Librada to her sharply.

"Nothing. Can't I only look into the tavern?" Her voice had a deep masculine burr.

"Not in a way to offend the neighbors."

"I was only looking at the gentleman. Hasn't he come from England lately? Didn't he formerly own the big house here?"

"What if he did, woman?"

"I wanted to ask for a brother of mine over there."

"Very likely; I don't know him. Won't you come in?"

"God be merciful, but I can speak with the gentleman. Will you come out, sir?"

Albert went out to *Arrecachada* who took him apart and whispered him that her mistress had important things to tell him; that she was in hiding near by and if he would pass through the upper garden carelessly she would join him there. Albert left the tavern, wishing to distract his mind until the time of the appointment. He went down the street of Doctor

Otero at the end of which reared up the parish church, the apse toward Cenciella and the front belfry looking over the fields above a bower of chestnut trees. On one side was a granite archway; on the other lay a little cemetery.

Albert sat down at the porch and meditated in silence for half an hour. The street, the church, and the grove were deserted. He overheard the sound of a spade in the earth. He walked around the church. The gate of the cemetery stood open. He went in. A man was laying out a plot of vegetables. He watched the newcomer, without rising or discontinuing his work. In one corner Albert found the tomb of the family of Diaz de Guzmán; he saw it for the first time. Marked on the front were the words, "All that is left of me." The dampness of the evening and the gloom of the place made him tremble. He asked the workman:

"Do you know anything about the graves, my friend?"

The man rose to his feet and placed his hands against his hips.

"Do I know about the graves?" He showed his yellow teeth. "Why, I am the grave-digger."

"Can you tell me where they buried old Rufa?"

"Rufa what? You see there are"—raising his eyes to heaven—"Rufa from Carmin, over there; Rufa from Nol, there; Rufa the Pendona, God forgive her, after all the crops she sowed! There was another called Rufa, the last housekeeper of Don Pedruco the coadjutor. God pardon them. And another—"

"None of them. She was the servant in the big house."

"Ah, she? She is here."

Albert followed the direction of his finger.

"Right here."

"Are you sure," questioned Albert, "there is no mark."

The gravedigger showed his teeth again.

"Dig down with your feet and see the dampness. Isn't there a stone marked 114?"

"Yes, Señor."

"Well, that's it."

Albert knelt in the damp tangled grass. Two palms in front of him lifted their golden yellow plumes. He sat down on his heels, crossed his arms, and gave himself to thought. His mother who had died at his birth was lying

here in the mossy tomb of Corinthian design; there also was his father whom he had never loved and from whom he had received only cruelty and disdain. He went back through the shadows of childhood, guided only by two familiar shadows: old Teodora and old Rufa who came to his mind again in her ancient attire, the green fan with the cat, the prayer-book taken out on her way to the circus; and now and then the furtive shade of his dear Uncle Albert, the mortal enemy of his father. This tenderness embracing persons and things, this fruitless questioning without peace, this dreaming unappeased, this emptiness of all his life—what was it but the absence of childhood? He had never been a child. Tradition in him was lacking; no trunk or root that held firm to the ground; his whole being was nothing more than dry reeds, withered leaves, empty talk, and sterility. He grew weak. He would have liked to have Rufa at his side, his head resting in her soft breast, to sleep as in the olden days. Suddenly, under some mysterious influence, he raised himself proud and resolute from out his weakness. Throughout his thirty-two years he had been unhappily left with empty, inactive hands. Until now he had

been dreaming; now was the time for action, for prompt action to catch up with the world. What action? What of importance? Action, action! "I must hurry," he said aloud. Around him lay the eternity from which he came. That other eternity where he would return rose up in a black dawn before him. Naked and noiseless, he would pass from one to the other like a cloud in the night.

"Come Señor," called the gravedigger, "I am going to close up."

At the gate Albert asked the man with the yellow teeth:

"Are you afraid of death?"

"If I were afraid, I should not be a gravedigger."

"I don't mean the dead, but of death, of the beyond."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I mean the after death."

"Ah—after death? You can see for yourself"—showing his teeth and pointing at his vegetables—"they grow very good cabbages."

The bells rang the Angelus. It grew dark. Albert gave the gravedigger a tip and proceeded toward the big house. The *Arrecachada* was watching for him in the keeper's house and

led him into the apartment where he found Teresuca in great agitation.

"What a beast of a man!" was her reference to her husband. "I overheard all from behind the door. What a beast! I don't think you should pardon him, as I curse everything he desires. On the contrary, injure him as much as you can." Her eyes looked insatiably cruel. At sight of them Albert grew cautious.

"He has done you so much harm, Teresuca?" His question smacked of a reproach.

Teresuca's eyes softened from gray to amber.

"Why are you not as familiar with me as before?"

"Since what has happened with Manolo, I couldn't if I wished."

"Yes, yes," begged Teresuca, shaking her head.

Albert was silent. Teresuca looked serious. "This is your child? Yes, clearly——" and he rose and went over to look at it more closely where it lay sleeping, its little hands clenched. He kissed it.

"Sit down, Don Albert. We have something to say."

Albert acquiesced.

"I have no intention of being an accomplice in his infamy. What Manolo said to you about the nine thousand pesetas was a lie. He never paid them."

"I saw that clearly."

"When I was in his confidence he confessed it to me. He did not believe you would ever think of them again."

"I never should have mentioned them if I did not need them."

"The letter you gave Manolo to take to the bank and get the money must be still there among the other papers. That is all you need." Albert did not reply. "More than that, our rent of the place before he bought it from you is yet unpaid. He also confessed that. You might get that back easily. He is a scoundrel! He is a criminal!"—and Teresuca's eyes took on again their threatening look. "And still more, when he was your servant, he robbed you for five years, he confessed it laughing at you and calling you a softhead; he robbed you of more than five thousand pesetas." Albert still kept his silence. "Besides, he did not buy the furniture with the house; the deed does not mention it. Seeing that there was silver, he sold everything. These things belonged to you

and when you are ready you can claim them."

Both were then silent. Teresuca's eyes searched in Albert's.

"Teresuca, I would do everything you advise if it ever had occurred to me. But learning it as I do from the lips of Manolo's own wife, I can make no use of it. I thank you for the kindness you show me, but I shall do nothing."

In her eyes there was a glance of scorn, which was followed immediately by seductive warmth.

"Where have you been kneeling that your trousers are stained with green? I shall clean it off."

She slipped down at Albert's feet, her head bowed down while she rubbed his knees, and then raised her eyes in an eloquent manner.

"Please get up, Teresuca." Albert spoke coldly, repelling her. The base treachery of the woman inspired him with aversion and repulsion. He was afraid to be brutal with her.

"How I hate him!" she muttered, her head pressed against Albert's knee. "The scoundrel, carrying on an affair with that widow next door. A shameless scoundrel; would you have believed it?" She lifted her head and ran her arms around his waist. "I am going to tell you

more. When he married me he knew very well that I had been with other men, but, of course, I had some money. Ah, if instead of living here in Cenciella we were again in Pilares, I should then tell you something."

There had been an affair between them as Albert desired to forget, imagining she had forgotten it on account of her frequent dishonesties. It had happened some years before.

Teresuca drew herself up and clasping her fingers behind his neck pressed herself against his breast, overcome and, at the same time, supplicating. She whispered softly:

"Don't you remember?"—and then as if expecting success—"this will be my first great pleasure."

Two wrenches from Albert, and Teresuca lay on the floor trying to hold herself on her left elbow. Albert, his eyes flaming with rage, lifted his hand and slapped her. Then he ran out of the room. On his way down the stairs he heard the baby start to cry and the voice of the woman muttering after him:

"You will pay me for this, you pig, *hijo de perra.*"

X

The shame of having struck Teresuca soon left his mind, filled as he was with deep concern for his future. For several days the bells from the cemetery of Cenciella sounded within his memory; a rumor grave, magisterial, and emotional that rang across the heavens without ceasing and any sudden peal seemed to reawaken the messages of the original bells. That great peal seemed to intone the saying: *Ars longa*; the others said: *Vita brevis*. They were telling Albert what he had told himself: Something must be done, and done quickly.

In his room in the hotel, he passed his days sadly with his hand stretched out to the future not knowing what to do. He asked himself: Of what use am I? He answered: Good for nothing. He looked in the mirror to pity himself, and his conscience answered: You are good for nothing because you are eaten up with effeminacy, because the solitary delight in dreaming and thinking as a pastime has corrupted you to the bones; in your poor sloth you believe that life has no value in itself but only in its ornaments. Mechanically he re-

peated aloud: That is the truth; life in itself is worthless except for its ornaments.

He thought of all the lives that were dark and sordid, without physical delights or intellectual pleasure; of the children of poverty, of beings confined in miserable, ugly homes, surrounded by hideous, dirty objects, their heads bowed down in ugly moods and fancies. And he said to himself, resolving his thoughts into words: Never! Death first!

Two weeks passed by. Albert found himself without a cent and owing fifteen pounds sterling to Robert Mackenzie. Instead of following his resolve to do something quickly, he had been unable to break the meshes of his meditations; on the contrary, he seemed to have become more deeply involved in their cords. Then he was seized by fear. Dark presentiments came over his mind. If I should fall sick, they would take me to the hospital. Then he regretted his weakness in yielding to such fancies, remembering that even if he had fallen sick in England they would have taken him to a hospital. The thought of Fina, in spite of his desire to avoid it, still pursued him and without knowing why, he ended in resting on the

thoughts of her love and the illusions around her.

One morning he arose with the resolution to do something quickly. He needed money immediately. He made his way to the office of the lawyer Castillo, a man very particular in his principles, and told him all that he could tell of his scene with Teresuca, asking at the end:

“What would you do about this money?”

“My dear Guzmán, these are the scruples of Father Gargajo. What will you do? You will do exactly what I shall do for you; you will demand it of this rogue and if he refuses we shall pluck it out of him. Why, man, this looks promising to me.”

“But do you think that I should take advantage of the vile disposition of this woman?”

“Come, come, do you think I would counsel you to do anything not in accord with the purest principles? You have a right to the rents, the furniture, and the silver according to a proper valuation. It is as clear as the light. You must receive some twenty thousand pesetas.”

“Perhaps not quite that.”

Albert went out greatly relieved from

Castillo's office. That night he wrote to Mac-
kinzie:

DEAR BOB,

Very soon I hope to send you the fifteen pounds you
were good enough to lend me.

I wonder why you said to me so often that I should
write to you. Your opinion, as that of an active culti-
vated man, would interest me more than that of a
professional litterateur. I wish you would explain to
me the sentiments and reasons that inspired your re-
peated advices. Affectionate regards for Nancy, Ben,
and Meg.

Yours, always,
GUZMÁN.

XI

“From worst to better!”

Such was the proverb on the learned lips of Marmol. At the moment there was something of the classic priest about him, in his flowing yellow robe which, in fact, was nothing more than his yellow duster and his tiara—in other words, his round English cap, on top of which his automobile goggles glittered like the great eyes of a bullfrog.

“Fifteen thousand pesetas,” murmured Albert. “Three years of modest labor. What are you laughing at?”

"At your modesty." And then he added drily: "Long before then you will be rich and happy."

"From marriage, no doubt?"

Marmol nodded so that Albert did not know how to look at him, either in the frog's eyes of his goggles or in his own heavy glances.

"Now tell me if I am not a good judge of people. I always said that Manolo was a thief."

"I would never have believed it."

"You are a defective. I also believe that you will very soon marry with——"

"Yes, never mind whom. Let us not talk of that."

Marmol smiled in a shrewd manner.

"What is the matter with you to-day? I should say you were trying to make fun of me."

"A bit, perhaps. Let us go on and take advantage of the sun and the afternoon."

"Go ahead."

In the porter's lodge was a post card for Albert. He read it in the jostling of the moving automobile. It read:

You always spoke of such extraordinary things in a tone of perfect naturalness that I felt myself obliged to accept them as natural phenomena, as things of such intensity that they revealed new sentiments to me. You spoke of the most difficult problems with such logic and clearness that I was proud of myself in finding my own ideas so easy and natural, and of ideas, generally admitted, with such precision and sharpness that I found myself perplexed in discovering that they were not so clear as I imagined. It seemed that you gave conscience to my eyes, my ears, my heart, and my head. What else is an author except the conscience of humanity? I can give no better explanation.

Your Friend,
Bob.

Albert read the card three times and then said to himself: And after all, I don't know where to turn myself.

The automobile ran along the road to the Virgin del Castano, skirting the parade grounds, a broad meadow where Marmol drew up. The soldiers in files were marching up and down on its green carpet, sweeping down the grass as though beneath a reaper's blade. The vast sounding of voices in accord with their march seemed like the measure of some pendulum. Throngs of children were gathered in large numbers to watch the soldiers; they looked like some sunburst of flowers and their cries seemed almost a perfume. The sky was

clear, the air vibrant, the earth would relieve itself in a glorious mood. When the cornets sounded, piercing the blue skies with their copper energy, Marmol, standing on the seat, said:

“I want to see if my children are here.”

Albert did not hear him. Marmol sat down again and put his hand on his shoulder.

“Listen to me, dear Guzmán. This is an evening for walking, not riding in a car. What do you say if we go to the top of the mountain?”

“All right. You are the leader to-day.”

“I see that,” answered Marmol, enigmatically enough to make Albert notice his tone, on any other occasion.

They got out in a heavy oak grove at the foot of the mountain.

“Take the automobile around to Julia’s, the cider house; we shall join you there.”

Albert selected a quiet shady spot and threw himself on the ground. Marmol began to hunt between the trees.

“You have chosen a bad place, Albert; get up and follow me.”

Albert meekly obeyed and followed him until he found a place to his liking. Then he said:

"You will wait for me here. I am going down to the booth to buy something to eat and drink."

He was lost in the foliage of the grove, his sacred tunic floating after him in Druidic style. Albert lost himself in a flood of disconnected thoughts. The puff-puff of the automobile brought him back to himself; he could see it passing through an opening in the trees; Marmol was at the wheel and turned to wave good-bye to Albert.

"That is better," said Albert to himself aloud, and he went back again into his meditations—"to make up his mind"—which was the way he described his mental tendency. Absorbed in his thoughts, he slipped down on his knees without realizing it. A linnet started to sing in a tree above. He turned to discover the little bird, as a soft warm hand was placed in his.

"Fina! I was thinking of you."

"I know it well."

"Blessed be God!" muttered Aunt Anastasia.

XII

Don Medardo shut himself in alone with Fina. The old man was sitting with a camel's hair shawl across his knees. Fina was standing before him.

"Sit down, my child."

"Let me stand, Papa."

"As you wish." He did not know how to begin. "For some days I have wanted to speak to you, since we learned the—well—the worthlessness of Telesforo. I am going to make you a proposition, but I do not force you to accept it. It is for you to make up your own mind. I advise, basing my opinion on the love of sister for sister——" His voice broke slightly and he cleared his throat. "You are to decide. You do not intend to get married?"

He didn't dare to look at his daughter. He dropped his eyes and awaited her answer. But Fina said nothing.

"You say nothing; is it because you are thinking to be married?"

"I cannot say, Papa."

Don Medardo's eyes studied her face, but found it inscrutable in its ecstatic waxen delicacy.

"Have you finally decided on Andujar? I thought that he had given you up and you had made up your mind to remain single. I see now I was mistaken and am glad. He is a proper sort of man and in a high-class career."

Andujar was a mining engineer. According to the verdict of the girls in Pilares, he was adorable on account of his correct ways, his soft eyes, the scarlet of his lips, the ruddiness of his cheeks, and the violet color of his closely shaven chin. He was a very beau-ideal. He would have pleased Don Medardo as son-in-law on account of the correctness of his position. He had paid assiduous court to Fina and proposed on several occasions.

Fina answered her father:

"Andujar has already renounced his suit."

"Then," asked Don Medardo open-mouthed, "you have an admirer that I am ignorant of?"

"No, Papa."

"Then," the old man pressed his forehead, "you speak in *potesis*? Do you understand the word?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Fina, my daughter"—his throat began to trouble him again—"you do not question my affection——"

"No, Papa."

"Well then, I am going to speak to you in *potesis*. I don't believe you will ever marry; therefore, I am going to propose something to you. With my hand on my heart, I assure you that the one hundred thousand pesetas which were carried off by Telesforo belonged to Leonor. When I advanced them it was clearly understood that the money was to be taken out of her share of the inheritance. Which is to say, that Leonor can now claim one hundred thousand pesetas less than you. I wish to leave it to your conscience if this is justice between sisters; what fault was it of poor Leonor? Besides, she is married, widowed I might say, and has a child."

Don Medardo was exhausted, and could not go on.

"What would you like me to do, Papa?"

"Whatever your conscience tells you," he added, gathering back his strength.

"Don't you think that all the money I leave should be equally divided between you, just as though I, and not she, had lost it? Doesn't your conscience say that?"

"My conscience doesn't say anything, Papa."

"Alas, Fina," sighed Don Medardo, letting his hands drop over the sides of the chair.

"But my heart tells me things. I don't know why you should discuss this with me. I am in need of nothing, and if some day I possess anything, then Leonor may share it with me as her own. And, regarding my marriage, what is the connection, Papa? If anybody wishes to marry me because of my money, shall I be forced to marry him? Do you think I cannot discover his purpose?"

"Come to me, Fina, and let me kiss you. You are an angel." He kissed her, his eyes filling with tears.

"Don't be childish, Papa. Who would see any heroism in what I am doing?"

"My daughter, you are really heroic. However, I do not ask for your decision now. Think it over, and we shall speak of it again."

"I have thought it over and what I say now is definitive."

"God bless you, child; you may leave me now."

Josefina had hardly taken three steps outside Don Medardo's office when her silent

shadow joined her in the passageway. Aunt Anastasia did not like the looks of this mysterious conference of father and child, and suspicion and curiosity devoured her like fever. She foresaw some damage to her angel-dove, the innocent little saint. She was entirely aware of the goodness and prodigality of her nephew, but considered him capable of anything in his blind preference for his elder daughter. Therefore, she seized Fina by the arm, without losing an instant, and insisted on the whole story. When Fina had finished, Aunt Anastasia was almost strangled with anger.

"That's what I was afraid of. I smelled a rat. Wicked father without proper feelings!" she exclaimed, darting fiery looks at the office door.

"And did you renounce everything, my dove?"

"Come to my room; we can talk it over quietly."

In the room Aunt Anastasia wrung her hands together to hold down her sacred wrath. Fina spoke and the smile stole back across her dusky face. "Auntie, you are so put out and yet you would have acted just as I have. It

would be bad, if you did not and I know how good you are."

Aunt Anastasia melted so quickly that she was almost in tears.

"Yes, my dove, you are right. But your father! His actions are bad."

"If I have done right, Aunt Anastasia, it is because what he proposed is right; otherwise I could not have agreed to it."

This logic confounded and silenced the old woman. Fina went on:

"If papa's money belonged to you, Aunt Anastasia, what would you do with it when you were dying?"

"Leave it all to you, all of it."

"But that isn't right at all." Fina's smile grew more tender.

"You are the one that loves me most, perhaps the only one," added the old woman as if in justification.

"Which is to say, Aunt Anastasia, that people are esteemed by you for what you believe they think of you; so much you love me, so much I pay you. But I know you too well, Aunt Anastasia, to believe that that is true—that you love certain ones very much and that you pretend to yourself that you don't love

them because you imagine they don't love you; if this money were yours, you would divide it up equally."

Her Aunt Anastasia released her tears.

"Christ of the Rosary! what a child! It is as if she read your very soul," she stammered. "But as for you, I love you more than all the others, my dove."

"I know that very well, Aunt Anastasia."

"You know that and you know that everything you tell me must be as you say. You are a witch, my soul. The times you have said that Albert would come back. He will return, he will return, I could not believe it. But you had so much confidence that——"

"And he did return."

"Yes, they say he is in Pilares. But we haven't seen him yet."

"We shall see him and very soon." Then changing her tone: "Let us coax Leonor to take a walk outside the town, to distract herself."

They went up to Leonor's apartment, but failed to win her consent. Fina understood that she was ashamed to go out in the public gaze.

"Leonor, we can go out through the rear and

in two minutes we are in the country. We can even go without changing our clothes."

"No, Fina, let me stay at home."

They took Telin, smothered in the white linens and laces that only accentuated his copper hues. Once on the road, Fina proposed that they should walk up the Mountain. They crossed the parade grounds where four youngsters, also ascending, ran up to salute and kiss Fina. They were the boys of Alfonso del Marmol, robust little devils, the delight of the park, and the terror of all the other children. From earliest days they had taken a special fancy to Fina.

"Papa was with us," boasted Pepito, the youngest. He was panting, his ruddy curls falling over his forehead wet with perspiration; his short legs like those of all the brothers were covered with scratches; it was the family sign.

"Who is this baby?" demanded Rafael, the second, whose pantaloons threatened to fall down, the visor of his cap turned around on the back of his neck.

"Isn't he ugly!" cried Felipe, the third child turning his face away in displeasure.

"Is he yours?" asked Pepito.

"Keep still, stupid-head; she is a single

lady," said Alfonso, the eldest, puffing out his cheeks and looking at Pepito with glances of scorn.

"What has that got to do with it?" asked young Pepito.

"You don't know Papa, Fina?" asked Alfonso.

As soon as Fina said she didn't know him, all four raised a great whoop to call their father with such a clamor that Aunt Anastasia put her hands to her ears and the Kalmuck awakened in a fury.

Alfonso came up with his hat in his hand.

"It is a great pleasure. These little chaps have been telling me what good friends you are."

"And that's true," affirmed Felipe.

"And we always say she is very pretty," added Pepito.

"You don't need to tell me that, boys."

Fina thanked him modestly, without affection.

"Listen, Papa," said Alfonso, his hands against his father's collar, "that silly Pepito asked Fina if this was her child."

"This ugly baby——" was Felipe's interruption. He desired to emphasize his opinions.

Alfonso and Fina laughed heartily. Aunt Anastasia was somewhat scandalized.

"You are taking a walk?"

"Yes, Señor."

"These evenings are so beautiful."

"Yes, Señor."

Marmol wished to know where, but would not ask.

"It is very interesting to watch the soldiers and the youngsters."

"We won't stay for them."

Pepito came to the rescue.

"Where are you going, Fina?"

"Up the Mountain."

"Let us go with you," shouted all together.

"No, you are going to remain here."

Fina interceded and Marmol gave his permission.

"Good-bye and congratulations," said Fina as she left.

"For what?"

"For these handsome children of yours."

"Good-bye and felicitations also." Marmol smiled with an amiable grimace.

"For what?"

"For the honor I have had for the first time of knowing you and holding your hand."

With a formal bow they parted. At first the four youngsters clung around Fina like a quartette of pages, but very soon they started to run and engage in a thousand dangerous tricks which sent a knife through the heart of Aunt Anastasia. They tore down the trees, waded in the brooks up to their knees in the flood, tormented the cows until they grew furious, affronted the growing watchdogs of the farms, mocked the country girls and threw stones at the plowmen.

"Be quiet, you little rascals, for the love of God," begged Aunt Anastasia, expecting every moment to see one of them the victim of an angry cow or dog or infuriated rustic. "You see, Fina, what devils they are."

Fina, on the other hand, was greatly diverted by their antics.

"It is evident," added Auntie, sententiously, "that they are chips of the old block."

"Come, Aunt Anastasia, I don't wish you to cast reflection on that gentleman." The old woman withdrew into herself:

"He seemed very amiable. But he looked at you in such a way. They say he is rather dissipated."

"They say, they say, Aunt Anastasia; are you paying any attention to what they say?"

"Lord help me, my dove. You are always right."

When the walk was over, Fina engaged her tireless, young friends to meet her the next afternoon on the parade grounds. The following day Fina and Aunt Anastasia came alone, as the little Kalmuck had been too much in the sun. The four youngsters were waiting at the place appointed, depressed and mournful. Alfonso, as his father's representative, explained:

"Papa has strictly forbidden us to go up with you. And how lovely you look to-day all dressed in white!"

The three younger brothers showed some desire to rebel, but the eldest, with grand airs of authority, put down the first symptoms of their sedition.

"You know, he said he would come here himself to see if we obeyed him. Why do you think he forbids us, Fina?"

That is what Fina asked herself as she left the disappointed boys.

"Whatever may be the reason, my dove, I

am glad we can go alone. What a blessed evening it is, my darling!" added Aunt Anastasia.

Fina felt stirred with a strange and wonderful exaltation. Aunt Anastasia went back in memory over her earlier years on the farm.

"I prefer the country to the city, little one. See, at this time, they sow the hemp and water the flax; vegetables are also planted under the crescent moon; they lay out the pear and apple trees, and transplant orange trees and poplars. Under the declining moon it is wise to cut the reeds for baskets, to prop up the grape-vines, to prune the late trees, and to set up the bee-hives. If thunder is heard in this month it is a sign of the death of the rich and powerful, of headaches and ear-troubles. Throughout the entire month, diseases of the feet are very painful. But I see you don't listen."

Reaching the Mountain top they sat down under a heavy oak. The sound of an automobile came near, but they could not make out who was in it. It stopped and after some minutes of dreaming the sound died out in the distance. Fina rose to her feet.

"Where are you going, Fina?"

"I don't know. I feel restless; I would like to walk about to stir myself. I don't know why."

Aunt Anastasia pulled herself up with difficulty and followed her niece. They went on between the openings, Fina gripping hard at the arm of the old woman; with the other hand she pointed out a man that came into view, a man on his knees in the grass, leaning down. Aunt Anastasia started a cry, but Josefina silenced her with a gesture. She went up and took the man by the hand.

"Fina! I was thinking of you."

"I knew it well."

"Blesséd be God!"

Fina and Albert started to converse as though they had met only a few hours previous. Aunt Anastasia could not shake off her mystical spell.

XIII

The Fox's Paw

At last Aunt Anastasia recovered from her mystical spell, to find Fina and Albert conversing in the closest intimacy. Oh, great and

wonderful heart of her niece, that could so quickly forgive and forget her wrongs, the ingratitude and neglect! She approached the happy pair. Her age permitted her to moralize on the situation, so Aunt Anastasia spoke:

"When the fox was caught in the trap they say he bit off the leg that was caught and escaped with the three good ones. Last year's snows do not injure the flowers of to-day."

With the trappings of allegory, Aunt Anastasia wished to say that we should not keep our face to the past, and if our fortunes hold us back we should strive to cast off our burdens.

That night alone in his room Albert meditated on Aunt Anastasia's saying. The trap is the idea of death; the fox, or shrewdness of mind that dodges the ambush of fatality, is the spirit. Caught in the trap, weak men and weak nations lie on the earth, cowardly imagining that some kind or provident hand has held them there to await some new and happier fate. Strong hearts and vigorous people are stupefied by the danger, and put off immediately the excessive beauty of life, renouncing forever their first agilities and

enthusiasms to break from the trap with muscles taut for action and their motive forces centrupled for attack in power and efficiency.

Aunt Anastasia Makes a Discovery

From her youth, Aunt Anastasia had professed a fanatical abhorrence to kissing, influenced by the furious warnings of the pastor of the parish in his references to this pleasant activity. According to Aunt Anastasia, the kiss was the invention of Satan himself, one of the worst improprieties, and the silent gateway through which the perfidious passion entered the soul. For her a kiss was not merely a simple act of love but something associated inexcusably with shameful intimacies, and she seemed to have read in some learned old book of devotions that in remote ages when the Devil was ruling absolutely over the earth, the act of generation was the meeting of the lips. Regarding such mysteries, Aunt Anastasia had no very clear ideas, merely vague presumptions, which she had never wished to verify or define. A kiss between persons, not united by God through the ministry of the clergy, was a deep and grave sin; between married folks the conjugal kiss seemed one of

the necessary evils to which God, in his hidden purposes, consented; but it remained always something shameful. When Aunt Anastasia by accident one day surprised Hurtado giving and receiving kisses from his wife, she had felt a great upset and sickening in her stomach.

What was not her surprise then, in seeing how Albert and Fina kissed each other with passionate chastity, to hear as it were in the rumor of their kisses the very echoes of a celestial orchestra? She knew that heaven was the mansion of eternal love, but until these recent evenings in the grove, love had always been to her something ignoble and a meaningless word. She felt for the first time in her life a regret that she too had not known love. Her familiar theological notions made some protest. Angels and cherubs, in their perfect bliss, must have more than one sex, yet as pure spirits they could not kiss. So it was that Aunt Anastasia, without destroying their condition as pure spirits, granted them diverse sexes and lips warm and shining like rubies.

One morning when alone with Fina she said: "Everybody has a voice, but there are some voices made for singing. If I were governor I would prohibit"—she wrote a decree with her

finger in the air—"that anybody sing with a poor voice. And you?"

"If they could cheer up their hearts with it. But why do you ask me?"

"Do you like to hear a bad voice singing loudly? No, you nor anybody else. You see that, as old as I am, I have never learned what lips meant, or I should say, to make myself clearer, that souls were born to kiss each other."

Fina dropped her eyes, a slight blush spread over her olive cheeks.

And so Aunt Anastasia, at night alone in her bed, would indulge in fantasies on the *Ars Amandi*.

Cacoethes scribendi.

"Listen to a page from the Golden Legend of my soul, dear Fina, and pay me reverence, as to one of those youthful saints who in strength and glory slew the dragons and the monsters."

The misty rain trickled heavily on the window panes as Fina and Albert communed in a shadowy corner of Don Medardo's drawing-room. Aunt Anastasia at the end of a balcony was disentangling a skein of wool, and

disentangling her memories as well, dividing her attentions equally between the two. Albert, posing as the saintly conqueror of dragons, could not help laughing; there was a smile on his face, a rare smile that filled Fina with pleasure.

"Let us hear what dragons you have slain."

"Well, I have slain the fiercest of all, whose breath was poison, whose eyes paralyzed me, whose hundred mouths were opened, not to devour me but worse, to mock me. That dragon they call Ridicule. Now that I am sure he is dead, I no longer fear him."

"But, really, do you have such fear of the opinions of others?"

"Not the opinions of others, but my own opinion," and Albert changed his comic eloquence into a tone of confidential discussion. "You see how I chatter, and at times with such intensity and incoherence that you are left troubled and confused. I am not as I was two years ago."

"No, yet if possible, I love you more to-day; which is to say that you please me more as you are now."

"Formerly, there was for every act, for every thought, for every sentiment, for every

mood, a watchman, a Cerberus without pity, here”—and he pointed between his eyebrows—“here was the dragon.”

“Come, come, let us not call it a dragon, but a troublesome little germ. I know it did not leave you quiet for a moment. What a wrinkled forehead it gave you.”

“The real ridicule, the fearful kind, is to be ridiculous to oneself. It is the disproportion between the purpose and the act. Do I weary you?”

“What, is the germ still stirring? Of course, you don’t weary me, dear.”

“Then, shall I give you an example?”

“I understand you and will give you an instance of my own. That Carriles, of whom you have heard me speak so often, proposed to marry me and would have concealed the fact he wished my money.”

“Correct: he placed himself in a ridiculous position. But purposes in general are each one’s secrets, and outsiders can only conjecture or presume what they are; for sensitive souls the real terrible ridicule is their own conscience. Consequently——”

“Let one amble along carelessly and do nothing; as things never result according to the

measure of the intention, one is always left in ridicule of oneself. Altogether that is quite clear."

"It delights my heart to hear you discuss in this way, Fina."

"Flatterer and eulogist, I do not like you. What more were you going to say?"

"Other kinds of ridiculousness—that of incongruous things. For instance"—his eyes ran about the room looking for an expressive example—"for instance, the tassels on that lamp."

He burst into laughter:

"I shouldn't say so, I know——"

"I should. That is Papa's taste. Mama and Aunt Anastasia also think them exquisite. After all what do the tassels amount to—that is, to yourself? To you it seems that all the world and its activities are tassels."

"Yes, Fina," he answered humbly.

"And now?"

"Now?"

The divine and eternal messenger enfolded them in his hidden wings. They went on in their mutual confidences:

"It troubles me, Albert, that you should have so much trouble in killing this little germ."

"When one has been with the Jesuits for six years, it is the affair of a lifetime."

"You like them so much that you would send one and all of them to heaven in one act of martyrdom?"

"I don't like or dislike them, Fina, even if they have done me a great harm."

"Six years, Fina, day by day binding up my soul and repressing it firmly with the fear of ridicule, weakening it with the idea of the uselessness of force. When one remains a believer after these six years, he becomes a friar or surrenders to them like a corpse. When one has lost his faith——"

Albert's voice shook with emotion. Fina pressed his hands, without a word to show that she recognized his feelings. Then she said calmly:

"I understand what you suffered and I, as well, have suffered with you. But you were going to tell me other things about this dragon, eh?"

"Yes, I would like to clear up something which may have appeared obscure. You have heard me say several times that I had determined to reconstruct my life on a plan which will take no longer, I hope, than two years, so

that at the end of that time I may say to your father: Señor, I wish to marry Fina immediately. You have heard me say that I am resolved to labor according to the Gospel of Saint Francis: Labor without pay, being poor. Labor without sensuality, being chaste. Labor in humility, being obedient.

The seraphic simplicity of the Saint of Assisi shone reflected in Fina's eyes. Albert went on:

"It is a religious undertaking. Do you ask why?"

A pause and then Albert raised his head and gazed on the face of his belovéd, so as to study the slightest shade of emotion aroused by his words. He spoke with a firm clear voice:

"I am going to be an author."

The delicate smile, spreading over Fina's face, gave strength and resolution to Albert's vocation. An expansive wave of feeling swept over him.

"You know that I have killed ridicule. I have always felt drawn to writing and have cultivated the art secretly. But nothing in the world could induce me to submit my works to public criticism. Why? For fear of ridicule, when they would question: Do you fancy,

Señor Guzmán, that the cosmic system or the human race will not completely fulfill their destinies if you do not empty your breast to communicate your private thoughts and sentiments? And they would have good reasons; as the majority of authors and artists of to-day who run around soliciting our admiration appear to me as ridiculous as those old women selling flowers in the entrances of the theaters who hold us up and pin a withered flower in our buttonhole. To put oneself forward socially by placing one's name at the title of a book can be justified only by a vocation, like a religious one. This may meet with sneers and mockery. What difference? Besides, it is necessary to have experienced big situations, very often insignificant at a glance, but from which one can extract, as though one were creating for the first time in history, values and fundamental concepts of conduct for the universe. I feel certain that such is my condition. Up to a short time ago, my spirit was like a night raining with stars; it was a stately dance of disordered splendors which made their appearance, intertwined and disappeared in chaos. Recently, all these free and arbitrary orbs, which at times left me in dizziness, have

harmonized themselves into a system as though in obedience to the laws of a celestial mechanism and those speaking splendors which were the only solace of my past life, have grown calm, become crystallized and are now eloquent and transparent. If through the unhappy influence of Jesuit education I had come to blot out the ancient world, I can now say that I have created a world out of nothing."

And Fina added smiling:

"For this you may thank the Jesuits."

And Albert also smiling:

"Yes, that is true."

*The Beautiful, the Good, the True,
and the Mass.*

Aunt Anastasia asked:

"Sincerely, Albert, do you find the baby quite as ugly as people say?"

"There is nothing that is ugly, Aunt Anastasia."

"How is that? At least some things are more attractive than others."

"There is nothing that may be said to be more attractive than other things, Aunt Anastasia."

"Then why have you fallen in love with Fina and not with me?"

Fina started to laugh and said:

"There is still time for him, Aunt Anastasia."

"Stop your flattery, young lady."

Señor Robles had stirred up the greatest kind of scandal in the house of Don Medardo by making a special effort to inform Leonor that her husband was a robber and a thief who had fled away with a shady female, in other words, a *femme galante*. That evening Aunt Anastasia's comment was a question:

"Don't you think, Albert, that his action was very bad?"

"There is no such thing as a bad action, Aunt Anastasia."

"Not robbery?"

"Not robbery."

"Not murder?"

"Not murder."

Aunt Anastasia made the sign of the Cross.

In discussing some trivial matter, Aunt Anastasia turned to Albert and asked him:

"What is the truth?"

"Aunt Anastasia, they asked that of Pilate and he washed his hands."

"What do you mean by that? That is true which you can touch with the hands, eh?"

"It also can mean that we should keep our hands very clean, as is impossible when we touch things; we are touching only our own uncleanness."

"Do you go to Mass, Albert?"

"No, Aunt Anastasia."

She remained silent a moment and then said:

"You say that everything is beautiful, which is the same as saying everything is ugly. You say that everything is good which is the same as saying everything is bad. You say that to know the truth we must wash our hands, which seems to me about the same thing as saying that we cannot know the truth. You don't go to Mass, which is the same thing as not believing in God. Nevertheless, you appear to me to be a saint. I cannot explain it."

And she fell into a profound confusion of thoughts. Albert said nothing; Fina prompted him:

"At least, you might thank her, my friend."

"Thank you, Aunt Anastasia."

But the old woman did not hear him; she was lost in her reasonings; within her spirit was an evil contradiction that she was never able to resolve.

Elegiac Figures.

As soon as Albert left his belovéd, he hurried to his room in the hotel, there to indulge his flowing fancy which spoke to him in such delicate and subtle impulses as to call for some expression rhythmic and plastic. Thereupon, he sketched out a series of short elegiacs, reserved in technique so that the conciseness of the literary form should induce the largest number of emotional suggestions. The high tension of his spirit provided him with rich images free from rhetorical corruption and with remote allusions that bore in their track a vibrant accumulation of visions. The ineffable sensation of veneration and awesome delight which was his in hearing merely the voice of Fina was as

The ripened tassels of the wheat
Bowed down beneath the wind's light feet.

The ineffable intuition of release from temporal laws, and the joyous mansions of

eternal life that came to him as he stood beside his belovéd, he found expressed in that mighty moment when the knife of Abraham was poised on high, as

The voice of God dwelt in the flaming bramble.

The ineffable certitude of having left behind his glooms and difficulties was defined in his imaging of the soul of Fina as a vast untrodden forest within which he had taken refuge, casting off

His load of old repine
As sheds the snake his skin
Amid the honeysuckle vine.

He delighted to stand beside Fina, to take her hand, to close his eyes, and subject himself as it were to her personality. It was a form of chaste voluptuousness that he translated into a poem;

To close mine eyes; then in my hand to take
With blind and wise and timid hold thine own.
Then stroke thine arm as humbly and as light
As dews that spread the mosses' silken bed.
To breathe thee perfumeless yet sweet
With childlike beauty, as the hay field's scent
Some springtime eve. Then deeply stirred to go,
As if absorbing bit by bit thy soul
Into my body—as the sunset's gold

Is lain upon the sea and every throb
My fibres give is steeped in baths of thee
As in a Tyrian dye. Ah, then no more
Is my delight in superhuman things,
After the miracle of holding thee
As in a balsam vial—seeing thee
With Alexandrine lens unto my eyes,
More clearly for the shadows that are near.

He chose, by sensitive preference, to use free-verse following the classic adage:

Numero Deus impari gaudet,

finding therein a more refined harmony than in set lines, breathing an incertitude that is in adequate correspondence with that aspiring of a soul in whom there stir the lyrical elements. He endeavored, also, that the verses should take an undulating course, one and all, establishing common tonic atmosphere, joining the parts together without rhetorical devices as in the sustained notes of a violin or the self-contained atmosphere of a painting by Leonardo.

Fina listened as Albert read the lines he had composed, so affected by the emotion of the poet that when he had finished his interpretations of the ecstasies of love, their lips came together in the silence. But when alone, Fina reassumed the clear-eyed serenity that was

characteristic of her and a kind of uneasiness possessed her. She feared that Albert's exaltation of spirit was sustained at the cost of his constancy. As the days passed on, she saw with satisfaction that her lover grew more and more human in his sentiments, changing his tendencies toward blissful ecstasies for desires more obtainable. The turn of his fancy was taking a new direction. These lines reveal it:

Upon the pillow thy dark wealth of hair—
Whereon reposing in its silken tide
I may imbibe the soft oblivion
Of all my ancient griefs, as though I bathed
In sweetly-flowing Lethe's stream.

Thine arching brows of purest marble white
Shall be the arsenal wherein I keep
The noble thoughts that shatter the weak grip
Of older weaknesses.

Thine eyes, two crystals fallen
From out the mystery beyond the walls
Of heaven's firmament;
May they be casement panes
Wherethrough my wilful, failing soul may look
Across the spreading of eternities.

Thy mouth, the unfading brasier's glow
That makes a hidden temple of our home;
Thy laughter, the firm column of my heart.
Let thy round arms in olive barenness twine
About my neck and lift themselves on high
As if to reach the upper skies, to give
The signal of their thankfulness.

Thy feet, alert and winged with glorious shoon
To tread the maze of perfume and of song,
Would tempt my kisses with the same caress
That lips lay lightly on the dove's pure wings.

Contemplative delight had been transformed to motives for the will. Albert began to build up an ideal, to desire. When he laid down his plan of action according to the Gospel of Saint Francis (Labor for love, not pay; sensibility without sensuality; obedience, or rather sincerity with himself), Fina realized that there was promise of a real harvest at the end. At last Albert arrived at writing:

THE IDEAL

Some corner for my household lair;
A book, a friend, a gentle dream
Quite undisturbed by doubt or care.

—ANDRADA.

A little house, no more: serene and white,
Far from the ruts of men and missions vain:
A garden where the seed shall quick requite
The humble effort of my hands again,
And honest labor crown my brow with rain;
A life removed from courtier jealousies,
Uncertain of to-day, the warning plain
Of bitter morrows that harsh fate decrees.
A rustic hovel set against a grove,
And from the seashore not too far away,
Where once my childhood laughed, where I may rove
Alone, unwitnessed in my silent sway,

My soul the garden of my every care.
Against the seawinds building my repair
Mine arms shall grow inured to laboring;
My sight grow sharper where the skies are dim
And darkness o'er the world of God doth bring
The tranquil shadows that are full of Him.
Fruits from my books belovéd shall I taste,
Memorial fruits in fertile rows aligned,
Whose juices never sour, never waste;
And I shall clothe me in the woofs designed
By history's turns upon its running loom;
And when the gallant morning cock shall crow
The final flight of witches from the gloom,
I shall arise in loving stealth and go
To place my kiss upon the baby brows
That pink and smiling mid their dreamland sleeps,—
For the old hours of love our memory knows.
Then shall I rest my head upon the deeps
Thy bosom stirs to soothe my weary cares;
Our couch shall be my paradise complete;
The morrow for our further joy prepares
And we shall find it in its dews as sweet
As is its new-born rose. Then shall I say:
“O God, let not Thy blessing fail!” and then
Amid our kiss, thou shalt respond, “Amen.”

This time Albert had won over the entire Tramontana family. They all had put a blind trust in him and anticipated the day when the household name would sound great and glorious throughout the world. Don Medardo gave him one year to arrive at the top of his fame; he had always believed his future son-in-law was born for something more than an

ordinary career among average men. As Albert declared that the peculiar character of his work demanded that he establish himself in Madrid for a considerable stay, all recognized this necessity at once; but Don Medardo stirred by a noble impatience urged him to depart as soon as possible.

"Time is money, my son," he said. "The gunner always behind the gun! My heart does not deceive me and, as I see that you will really have to go, and you need not forget our Fina, I say to you: March on as far as you can, bravely, bravely. The world is ready for you. And then the journey from Madrid is nothing. You are no longer children and your devotion is serious. Rise, rise to the top."

When Albert took leave of Fina, both were convinced that in a short time the white little house between the grove and the sea would soon be ready for them. Don Medardo accompanied Albert to the station and at the moment of the train's departure he desired to say: God help you, my son,—but a strange speechlessness seized on his throat and he was silent.



PART THIRD
THE EVENING

PART THIRD THE EVENING

οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν κρεῖσσον ἢ
—φίλος σαφῆς.

—EURIPIDES.

*Non si po' avere maggier né minore
signoria, che quella di sé medesimo.*

—LEONARDO DA VINCI.

I



SEPTEMBER morning in Lugano in 1910. It was almost eleven o'clock when Albert left his house. The dense, voluptuous garden of the villa seemed to drink in the full radiance of the sun. Meg's window, framed in rosevines, made the silence more sweet with a melancholy Italian peasant song that seemed to tremble on the motionless air.

In the three years that had elapsed in the actual life of Albert he had suffered many startling experiences. In literature he had conquered the good will of the learned and the

welcome of the public, but the returns from his efforts had not gained him sufficient income to maintain him properly. It was, perhaps, his good fortune that the police were able to apprehend Hurtado on the Island of Cuba and to hale him back to Spain with a comfortable accumulation of money, some of which he had carried off from Pilares, but much more accumulated in America through his skilful speculations, so that his creditors, who had already given up all hope, were surprised to find themselves again presented with their money.

Passing through his laborious, sentimental process, Albert had reached what he considered the last point of concentrated egoism, the dissolution of the passions, and that weakening of unruly desires; at the sovereign good, the equilibrium, at self-control, at unity. His intellectual activity and esthetical self-consciousness had, as their one end, the intensification of life as the supreme pleasure; therefore, though he placed himself at the center of entire Creation, his morale was sad, he was severe with himself, and tolerant toward others; his taste, in spite of having been formed on an aristocratic

cratic selection of ideas, was democratic and possessed the beauty of all natural things; and in conclusion, as his existence seemed a flame between two shadows, so did his method border, on the one hand, on a skeptical emptiness from which he had originally emerged, and, on the other hand, on an emptiness where his voice in its weakness took on distant echoes of mysticism. Distinguishing between the two lines of his thought, the feeling from the perceptive, he recognized that both were engendered in love; and, attaching the pleasure of life to the certitude of knowledge, he had come to embrace the whole of Creation with his sympathy universal in its equal love for all. At such a point, woman could offer him nothing but the sensual pleasure of a day's delight, the fare of the table d'hôte of existence, or otherwise the disinterested delight of contemplation according to the measure appropriate to all existence. He could not consecrate his life to a woman nor bend from the perpendicularity of his life in binding it up with another. He had written and broken with Fina. On receiving his letter, Fina had said in firm tones: "This time he will not return." As she sent

no answer to him, Albert after a few days believed that Fina had resigned herself to the fatality of fact.

Bob, Nancy, and Meg expected him for luncheon. He came late, excused himself, and after a few minutes in the fountain-court of the garden they all rose and went into the dining-room. The three years that had passed had also made changes in the Mackenzie family. The hunchback was gone. During the summer before, he had been found floating on the surface of the lake. Some said it was an accident, but the fact remained, even if the Mackenzies wished to avoid it, Ben had committed suicide. It had aged Bob suddenly; the hang of his lips took on an expression of imbecility; his pointed beard had lost its gold and had grown snowy white; his flabby hands with black and purple veins trembled badly; his burning eyes were lit by two flames, one lascivious, the other despairing of the power to satisfy his passion. Anita still preserved her distinguished bearing of *Virgo Vestalis Maxima*, but her pink skin was dried, faded, and lamentably disfigured by large black veins, and her face had lost its positive character. Meg had arrived at a high point of beauty, spiritualized somewhat by her

slender lines, the darkness of her eyes, the thinness of her lips, and the light development of her bust. From time to time she coughed shortly in a weak and childish way. Bob with his plain hard sense had said to Albert:

"Meg will die some of these days if we cannot get her a husband. After all, what could we more desire?"

Albert also believed that love might prove the salvation of Meg.

Throughout luncheon Albert kept up a continual talking so that Bob should not suffer, as he did, from silence and solitude. Bob and Nancy avoided each other's eyes or, if they yielded to the temptation, they soon dropped their glances behind a leaden cloud. They drank without stopping, slaves to their old illusions. Meg at luncheon was sad and still. She was likely at unexpected moments to rouse from the depths of gloom to the most exaggerated exhilaration. Two or three times Albert surprised her honest green eyes with a look imploring health and contentment.

At the close of the luncheon there appeared in the dining-room a youth of about the same age as Meg; with the profile of an Apollo, large bold eyes, carnal lips, golden curly hair,

and a strong athletic body. His name was Ettore Segneri, of an Italian family transplanted to the Argentines. He lived with his parents in a villa adjoining the Villa Anita. Bob received him curtly; he could not hide that this specimen of splendid youth wounded him and inspired him with hatred.

"Meg, my child, you had better take Ettore out in the garden. Albert and I have something to talk over."

It was evident that nothing was more to the young man's desire. Albert, who studied him secretly, felt also a strong unpleasant antipathy, something similar to what, in his outgrown youth, he had known as pangs of jealousy. After Meg and Ettore had gone, Nancy rose:

"As you have something to discuss——" and retired majestically.

"Did you wish to say anything in particular, Bob?"

"Nothing. I only wished to be left alone with you. Let us go into the sitting-room."

"As you like, Bob."

The room looked out on the garden through two large windows at that moment closed by shutters. Albert went from one side to the

other, seeking some opening from which he might peep into the garden. Bob had thrown himself into an armchair.

"Dear Bob, it seems to me that the opportunity to arrange Meg's marriage now presents itself."

Bob lifted his head. He heard, but did not consider what Albert was saying. Albert went on:

"If I don't deceive myself, this young man is a great admirer of your girl."

Bob paid no attention and Albert pressed the point:

"He is a handsome chap."

"Who is handsome?"

"Your neighbor, Ettore."

"Don't speak to me of that jackanapes."

A secret joy took possession of Albert's heart.

"Jackanapes? Don't be cruel, Bob."

"And you say—that Meg, with this—But, what right have people to be so young as not to know the value of life?" He remained silent a moment.

"At any rate—no matter with whom, the sooner the better. But I wish you would not talk to me about these things."

Bob's head fell over on his chest and in a moment he was sound asleep and snoring lightly. Albert took up the first book he chanced on from the table so as to make it appear that he at least thought of reading in the open air under the trees. He passed down several paths and explored the hidden places. He went from side to side, agitated and impatient. He went around the entire grounds, ending up in a little pine-grove near the entrance of the villa. The heat was heavy and intense, but there was a breath of freshness in the grove. Albert's eyes stared into the dense shadows. There, in a hammock stretched between two trees, lay Meg asleep. Her head was bowed lightly over her right shoulder and her arm hung down below it. Albert crept closer; then brought his face close enough to feel her breathing. In the half-light of the grove, Meg's color seemed no longer human; she was a diaphanous being, like the early dawn, like the sunset with the glow of pearls. Between her pale rose lips her breath sounded like the hiss of some tiny serpent. Albert, stricken with compassion, with tenderness, and, perhaps with love, bent over to place a light kiss on her lips. He felt his strength leave

him; he was afraid he might fall against her and cause her to wake. He pulled himself together, his color changed and breath suspended. A second time he bent over and a prolonged kiss left him there in intoxication. He desired to draw away from the lips of his sweet divinity, but could not find strength to do so. At last he tried brusquely to break the spell, but as he moved the arms of Meg enwound about his neck, holding him prisoner while she herself rained kisses, quick kisses mingled with laughter and tears, upon him.

All that Albert could do was to murmur:
“Meg, my Meg, my sweet Meg.”

She sat up in the hammock.

“You thought I was asleep, stupid, but I was only pretending so as to tempt you on. From the moment of your arrival, my only thought has been to make you love me. And I have succeeded, but you have refused to acknowledge it to yourself, stupid, stupid, so that I began to think I should have to make the declaration myself.”

Albert studied deeply the green eyes wherein he feared to discover again the malign expression she used to show in her childhood as she tormented her brother.

"Why do you look at me in this way, as if you had lost your senses? Don't you like me a great deal? I love you very much—and you?"

"Meg, dear Meg, don't talk that way."

"Then how shall I talk? I don't know any other way. Don't you see that I am crazy, crazy with joy? Tell me, how shall I talk to you so that you also may be pleased?"

Albert was silent. A light trembling passed over him as though he were ashamed of himself.

"But what are you thinking of, chappy?"

"Meg, for heaven's sake, don't call me chappy."

"Oh, what a prude you are! You are wounding me. I wish I could cry"; she hid her face in her hands.

"No, I don't wish you to weep, I don't wish you to weep,"—and drawing her hands apart he kissed her warm eyelashes.

"Lift me in your arms over to that embankment." She was laughing, though her eyes were still misty. She was dressed in a light blue silk of a flowing pattern. Through the transparent material could be seen the top of her underwaist with its lace and ribbons. The

rose of her skin took on a deeper shade on the upper part of her breast and arms.

Albert raised her in the air with one arm under her knees and the other under her shoulders, his hand at the base of her breast. With his tender burden, as light as a garland of flowers, Albert brought her over to the bank smothering her in kisses. He was about to put her down when she murmured:

“No, let me sit upon your knees.”

“Don’t let us be foolish, darling; somebody may see us.”

“What difference would that make?”

Albert did not wish to continue to look into her eyes, sure that the malign look was now in them. When they had sat down, as Meg desired, he was overwhelmed and embarrassed with the amount of her caresses and kisses so wise and sophisticated. Albert then remembered how sharp had been her attention from her childhood observing the voluptuous exhibitions of her parents. He felt a sort of aversion and, without thinking, resisted somewhat the continued blandishments.

“What is the matter, Albert? Don’t you like me to kiss *you*?” Her voice trembled.

"Ungrateful wretch! I don't love you; all is over." And she attempted to rise but Albert prevented her.

"Don't you see, Meg, that I don't know what I am doing; that to-day I am unconscious of what is happening, that I am stupid? No, don't leave me; I feel that you are united to me bodily in loving me."

"Well, it is all right anyhow. I love you. I love you."

Meg finished the phrase, but Albert's memory continued it in memory to "I love you, puss, puss." It was the same speech she had made to Pussy, her cat of three years ago; the extravagance, endearments, and embraces which now were discommoding him were of the same kind as those ceaselessly lavished on her cat three years before.

"Darling Albert, you see how happy I am. What else can I do; There is no living for me in this house as you can see. It is a hell, worse than hell. If you don't take me away from here, I believe I shall die in a short time. Papa and mama are not persons; they are monsters, always in fury, raging inwardly although they would like to hide it. I can do nothing else. There is a good proverb which says: '*Bacca*'

tabacco e Venere riducon l'uomo in cenere.’’

“As you love me, Meg, I repeat that it wounds me to hear you speak in this manner.”

“How would you have me speak, dear Albert?” she sighed against his breast. “Who has ever taught me to speak otherwise than I do? What have I been looking at ever since my childhood?” Her voice grew dryer and more hostile at every word. Suddenly she melted and blurted out, “Take me away from here. I wish to live, to be good, to be happy. Let us escape together.”

For an instant Albert was astounded. Then with a supreme and desperate resolution he declared.

“We shall get married immediately.”

“Oh, darling Albert, I adore you! I had not dared to hope for it. Honestly, you desire to marry me?”

“Yes, Meg.”

“Immediately?”

“This very day, if you wish, I shall ask your father.”

“Not yet; wait a while. I shall tell you when.”

They were silent for a few minutes, then Albert said:

"And I have been imagining that you were in love with Ettore."

"I, in love with that—Oh, come——"

Still Albert did not dare to look into her green eyes for fear of their expression. His impassiveness had suddenly left him like a hat blown off his head, as if all his previous life, elaborately arranged, had fallen like a house of cards.

II

During dinner that night Meg was so expansive and radiant that her parents, in spite of the fact that generally they paid no attention to her, could not help noticing it.

"What has happened to Meg?" asked Nancy with a tone as if of complaint at the indelicacy of Meg's innocent joy.

"But cannot one be happy here or must one always try to hide it?" asked Meg, veiling her reproach in soft intonations.

"Meg, your parents desire above all things your contentment and happiness. Is it not so?" said Albert. Bob and Nancy assented with sad smiles. "I can see no reason for any-

body to be sad in this house and if there should be any cloud, let us drive it off at once, at once. It is resolved that we are all of us gay and that we shall so continue," he spoke in optimistic tone.

Bob permitted himself to share in the vehement warmth of the young visitor.

"Albert speaks wisely," he murmured.

Nancy swallowed down a flowing glass of Bordeaux.

Albert and Meg sat vis-a-vis at the table. She was gowned in a soft silk, slightly décolleté, ornamented in dull gold and silken embroidery. The turn of her neck revealed two violet shadows at its base and displayed a flowing elasticity and capriciousness that left the taut muscles visible. It was an exquisite neck, and Albert did not fail to admire it. Her flowing hair was caught up simply like a mass of liquid gold ready in a moment to overflow. Her shining lips seemed to have been crystallized into a translucency through which was showing the clear light of the lamps. Albert suffered with the desire to press them, feeling that his teeth would sound against them as though against a precious stone.

"I think I can guess what you are wishing, Albert," murmured Meg. Albert gave a sign that he was about to speak, but Meg imposed silence with her finger to her lips.

Just at the end of dinner Ettore again made his appearance. A gloom fell over Albert's heart. He could not help making a comparison between himself and this splendid youth and feeling that it was ridiculous to think that Meg should prefer himself.

"Let us go to the Kursaal," said Bob, getting to his feet in bad humor.

"Won't you have your coffee here?" asked Nancy.

"We can get it there."

"Well, if you are going out I shall retire to my room; I didn't sleep well last night," declared Meg, disdaining the Apollonian youth who was visibly dejected.

Albert thought:

"He is in love with Meg. She desires to make him jealous of me." She came over and leaned on Albert's arm, saying:

"Papa, how selfish you are! You are always taking Albert away; you wish him only for yourself."

"Come, we are going, child."

"I shall say good night to you."

The two men went out through the door; without looking back Bob called:

"Au revoir, Ettore."

As Bob strode on ahead through the garden, Meg whispered to Albert.

"I see that you are jealous and it hurts me."

"If I didn't love you I would not be jealous."

"But I love you and I am not jealous."

"No? Then I promise not to be jealous of you, Meg. Your father——"

"Oh, father neither sees, nor hears, nor understands——"

Hidden behind the shadows of a cluster of rhododendrons in flower, Meg placed on Albert's lips one of those long kisses she had learned from her parents. In Cassaratte Bob and Albert took a cab.

They found the gardens and café of the Kursaal deserted. Albert inquired of a servant; there was a performance in the theater. They procured tickets in the first rows and ordered their coffee. On the stage were two gymnasts, a man and a woman in lilac tights displaying their animality. Afterwards there came on three clown acrobats dressed in the modern style of dirty tramps.

Bob followed the performance with some interest, forgetting himself so as to laugh several times. On the other hand, Albert was wrapped up in himself; intoxicated either with joy or bitterness, he could not say. Bob restored him with a touch and said:

"Let us get out of here. The show is ridiculous."

"What is the matter with it?"

"It is ridiculous; I cannot stand it." He hurried out.

As Albert followed him there came out on the stage a popular songstress and he overheard the mechanical refrain: *La gioventu non ritorna mai.*

They went up to the great gambling-hall. It was empty. Seated in the two concavities that outlined the long green table like a violin were four *croupiers* conversing weariedly with expressionless faces. Now and then one of them would roll the hard rubber ball over the painted wooden sides of the wheel where the numbers showed behind the circle of horses that moved in ranks.

The two friends went into the reading room. They turned over the pages of some periodicals and dropped them without reading anything.

"What has happened to-day, Albert, that you don't say a word?"

"Eh?" and a smile spread over Albert's face.

"What are you smiling about?"

"Over a recollection."

"Something you can tell me?"

"No, dear Bob, I cannot tell it."

He was thinking of the judgment of a certain theatrical critic who had declared that Albert could never succeed as a dramatic author because of his incapacity to feel or understand a passion.

Albert held in his hand a German periodical. At Bob's question he read the first thing that came under his eyes. It was:

"Weissbach is the favorite resort of all those who delight in solitude. Thousands of lovers of solitude gather here constantly from all parts of the world."

"And what are you laughing at now?"

Albert handed him the periodical.

The gongs sounded that the gambling was about to begin. A good sized group of all ages, countries and classes gathered into the salon and placed themselves around the table. The solemn voices sounded:

"Marquez vos jeux, monsieurs."

"A vos jeux."

"Les jeux sont faites?"

"Rien ne va plus."

Bob passed around the room, stopping now and then to stare unblushingly in some old man's or woman's face with a scornful sneer. Albert was afraid that any moment something disagreeable would happen. Bob turned to him and said laughing bitterly:

"'That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once.' You see how the great master could utter an absurdity. Bah! After death what difference whether one has or has not had? This wrinkled, pulpy face had once a mouth for love, eyes to ogle and, perhaps, may have been beautiful and desirable. 'That is the question,' sweet Shakespeare."

His irritability was worse than ever before.

At one end of the table sat a young German between two *demi-mondaines* of the higher class, also Germans. The young man stuck out his red and cropped head like a gigantic orange. The women were beautiful in the swollen cow-like German style, with plump round necks and bare and greasy shoulders. The young man petted them with grave luxury. Bob could not take his eyes from them.

"Ah, imbecile, what are you doing? Don't you see you are sowing sorrows for your future? Look around at these other repugnant faces that once had tongues, and lips, and eyes —ah, imbecile!"

He went on with his insults, until Albert interrupted:

"They might understand Spanish."

"What difference would that make?"

"Very well, we have had enough of this. It is going too far; you are becoming impossible."

Bob then behaved like a child one has threatened with punishment. He seemed to be about to cry.

"Don't quarrel with me, Albert. I don't know what I am saying sometimes. You are right. Let us go back to the house. I cannot stand these people; they hurt me."

Before leaving the salon he stopped before a mirror to look at himself with a tearful desolate expression. In the café, he swallowed another whiskey and took a carriage back to the villa. While on the way he turned to Albert and said.

"One of my deepest impressions here"—and he touched his forehead—"is something you said to me a few years ago regarding

friendship. You said that friendship was one of the fundamental, necessary virtues in life and a man would be more happy when he could turn all his affections into the form of friendships; that he could live without his parents, his children, his lovers, but not without friends; that paternal love, or filial, or sexual, is not enduring nor satisfactory nor calming, unless it leads toward a sentiment of close friendship; that even the relations of irrational creatures and inorganic things are ennobled with the character of friendship; that it is the one form of affection in which he who engages does not sacrifice his personality nor, on its account, annuls, entangles, or destroys himself; and that unhappy is he who, when he loves a woman, fails to develop on the side of friendship, and falls into the passionate extreme."

Bob spoke with energy and ease, trippingly enunciating each of his words; he concluded:

"Do you think that passion is too strong or too deeply rooted? That this intimate friendship is now impossible? Do you think it is too late?"

Bob was trembling. Albert was thinking of his own problem and answered gloomily:

"It is surely late."

III

Albert had thrown himself on the bed; he had just spent two hours in a rowboat with Bob. The afternoon was hot and humid. Suddenly, he started at the sounds of voices in the garden, of Meg and Ettore together.

From behind the curtains he peeped out, catching snatches of the lovely voice of Meg as arm in arm with her youthful admirer, she passed down the avenue toward the lake; they chattered and Meg laughed joyously. It looks as if she wished me to see this, thought Albert. He could not believe his eyes. That very day after luncheon she had lavished on him the same passionate demonstrations as before. He pretended to satisfy himself with the natural explanation that there was nothing strange about it, as they had known each other from childhood. But he felt a pang sharper than he had ever known. He resolved to have a scene with Meg at the first opportunity, to be severe with her, even cruel, and let her know that all such liberties were over for her. After dinner he found a chance; Bob had retired, worn out by his exercise of the afternoon, and they were left alone. Albert felt his irritation

rising as Meg went on carelessly polishing her finger nails, hardly conscious, it seemed, of his presence; he began to weaken and finally in an act of surrender he approached her with glances and words of love.

“Meg,” he begged trembling.

“What is the matter?”

“Meg, why will you torment me?”

Meg sprang up from her seat nervously and looked at him with cold eyes and an ironical smile.

“Explain yourself.”

“If you love me, as you say——”

“I say I love you? You must be crazy.”

Albert was astounded. His eyes stared with horror. He could not speak. He turned on his heel and slowly walked toward the door.

“Don’t go. I have something to say.” Albert stopped without turning his head.

“If you have taken as serious my little attempt to amuse myself, forget it as quickly as possible. I shall do all I can to help you.”

He closed himself in his room and threw himself on the bed. His spirit seemed to have been torn to tatters. He lay stupefied for a long time until aroused by a cautious rustle at his door. Through the crevice came a rose-colored

missive and fell on the floor. For a while he let it lie there; then he took it up and read it:

I have not the heart to let you suffer all night. I am suffering more than you. Don't pay any attention to what I said just now. I did it to test you. Now I am sure you love me truly. I?—I adore you, I adore you. Kisses, kisses, kisses.

Your own forever,
MARGARITA.

This burning epistle left Albert in a hurt and troubled state that he could not explain.

IV

The next day Meg's tears were so abundant that Albert had to assure her twenty times over that he pardoned her and had forgotten her capriciousness.

"Nevertheless, I am not easy. You are not frank with me. There is something you don't tell me. I can see it in your face. You don't seem to want to kiss me."

They were in the rhododendron bower. Albert shamefully confessed that he suffered terribly from jealousy.

"I don't hide anything from you, Meg; and

as for not wanting to kiss you——” He pressed her wildly to his breast in a delirious kiss.

The rest of the day they were no longer alone. But jealousy was eating up Albert's heart by the minute. He could not sleep, but arose early in the morning and went out to walk among the willows. At ten o'clock Nancy and her daughter came into the garden, dressed in street clothes and ready for shopping in town. Albert offered to row them over to the public landing-place. They accepted and he worked at the oars quickly, so as to return in as short a time as possible. He was seized with an idea.

He came back and mounted the stairs of the house, cautiously exploring on every side; he reached Meg's room, entered, and closed the door. I am a low person, he said to himself: It was in the style of Louis XVI, delicate and fresh as a rose-bower. He went directly to the desk. It was locked. Evidently she doesn't intend to leave it open, he thought. He was tempted to force it. He tried the drawers under the mirror; they were also locked; he went to the bedside table and opened the top case. It contained two little

leather cases, some folded batiste underwear, ribbons, a prayer-book, and a French novel with a lascivious cover; everything was saturated in perfume of roses. He hesitated a moment before opening the other compartment, shamed at this disloyal scrutiny. He pulled open the little door, fearing to encounter more intimate details of Meg's privacy. His cheeks were burning. He found a pair of slippers of red leather and silken lining, a box of embossed leather in the style of a Gothic casket, and inside of this some keys, one of which fitted the desk. In the desk he came across several letters. They read:

MARGOT, MY BABY:

As you insist that we communicate by letter so as not to arouse the suspicions of your papa, to whom I can easily see I am not at all agreeable, I obey you. But I wish to tell you all my thoughts. I think that the reason you give me is not the real one. I don't understand you; you are such a strange woman, not like any other and that is the reason, perhaps, why I am so wild about you and you think me so crazy. I believe that you are forcing me to stay away from you, so that I, not being able to stand it any longer, will come to do what you have asked of me.

Albert concluded: she wished to run away with him also. He went on with the letter:

My baby, *mon ame*, do you not realize that this is madness? Just consider that if my parents took it amiss

and yours also, what would become of us? I can see you making one of your scornful shrugs as you read this. No, no, my adorable Margot; consider well what I am telling you, as it is for your own good. Things may be arranged in another and more natural manner, and, I hope, very soon. My studies will take two years more. But after all I shall do only what you ask. Anything rather than find myself slighted without cause, as on the other night when you went out to say good-bye to your father and Señor Guzmán.

I am entirely yours and dream to make you mine alone.

ETTORE.

ANGEL:

If you only knew how much I suffer. I have not dared to come to your house to-night, so I send you this through the gardener; I hope he will place it in your hands to-day. When I left you and passed through your garden (and how happy I was for those few minutes), I came resolved to do everything you asked. But reaching home and finding myself with Mama and Papa, so unsuspicious of my plans (as it would be necessary to steal the money from them), I lost my courage. Don't be angry, for God's sake! Have some pity and confidence in me. We shall one day be happy, *bambarella mia*,

ETTORE.

From the date and the contents of the letter Albert concluded that Meg had received it after she had renounced him, attributing her love scenes to mere caprice and, later on, sticking the rose-colored renewal between the crack of his door. He wished to read no more of the

letters. He put them back among her papers as they were before, locked the little chest, and went out to walk beyond the Villa-Anita.

He had regained immediately his spiritual balance. His ideas and sentiments took on again their impassioned, esthetical serenity. The tragedian, worn out by his mortal furies, was transformed into a spectator delighted to watch the linking up of events and observe the *pathos* so as to purify his own passions. He was freed miraculously from the disordered whirlpool into which he had been swept and, now on dry land, was seated tranquilly to watch only the passing tempest and sport of natural forces. For him Meg had become merely an accident of the world, like the snow-topped mountains, the passing clouds and the lake with its cool depths and changing colors; she was material upon which to think, to feel and to express in a concrete way the pressure of his own life, but not for offerings of sacrifice of his divine liberty of spirit and, with that liberty, the harvestings of his days to come. Meg was now only a curious object, an interesting artistic theme; she had fallen from tyranny to slavery; for, as the form dominates the poor artist, so the good artist overcomes the form

and regulates everything according to the rules of harmony. Albert thought of life as a work of art, as a ground for reflection on sincere impartial matters of feeling.

He went back to his villa with such strength of mind that his heart seemed to be turning on hinges of diamonds.

V

During luncheon, Meg kept silence as though from melancholy and fatigue. Her eyes drooped mysteriously and she threw a long glance of love at Albert, who, for all his resolution to appear indifferent and sure of himself, surrendered to the fascination of her glance and responded no less warmly to her eyes. At last he said to himself: Perhaps the sentiments of this morning were only sophistries provoked by the assurance that Meg was in love with Ettore? Could they not be merely the ridiculous and deceiving lenitives that I apply to my wounds? Beneath the witchery of those green eyes Albert did not know what to think, but he was resolved to break with Meg

at the first opportunity he could find for conversation.

After luncheon when Bob fell asleep in his customary chair, Albert went down into the rhododendron bower. Meg was there lying in the hammock with a book. He approached softly; his spirit trembled in its tangle of uncertainties as though his future balance were involved and he was in danger of yielding forever; on one side was liberation; on the other, delirious, fatalistic, eternal love for this woman. From her—a gesture, a smile, a word—that would decide all. These light moments in the perfumed shadows of the grove were the supreme climax of his past in their meeting with this future.

“Why don’t you come and kiss me?” Meg asked him in a supplicating whisper.

“Because I have not come to kiss you but to speak seriously,” Albert answered severely. Meg’s shrug was so disconsolate and innocent that Albert lost his coolness. He approached a step and muttered: “Haven’t you any shame?”

Meg did not answer, but her eyes were lighted with a sudden joy; her lips trembled

to hold back their smile. Albert saw this clearly and repeated:

"Have you no shame? You hear me."

Meg nodded her assent. A golden ringlet escaped and hung in front of her eyes. Her white hand seemed blue in the shadows as she put the stray lock in its place, and as it persisted in coming loose she made a gesture of impatience as if it were the only thing that troubled her at the time. She then turned and looked at Albert with childish insolence. He with increasing loss of ease continued:

"Do you think that you can fool me as if I were a *pipi*?"

Meg swayed her head slightly as if to say, "Lord, what a word!"

Albert's anger growing as he went on, he fixed his eyes on her face, watching her mimic gestures. But her breathing, short and agitated, the movement of her light breasts no longer existed for him. Her gesture of reprobation at the word "*pipi*," a relic of Albert's wild night-life in Madrid and now used involuntarily, made him still more furious. Therefore, he ran on to describe his spying, and the finding of the letters. At this point it would have been a great relief for him, and he

ardently desired it, if Meg had taken offense and hurled in his face the baseness of his conduct. But she did not open her lips, her eyes steeped in their mysterious joy, her cheeks trembling. Then Albert seized her by the arm violently, at the same time calling her with deliberate distinctness by a vile name. He drew back surprised at himself and put his hands to his face. Meg began to weep. She wept with joy and sobbed:

“How you love me! How I love you!”

“Eh?” inquired Albert, letting his both hands drop in astonishment.

“How you love me! How I love you!”

Albert fell upon her violently, held her head, and brought her forehead to his and tried to draw out the last shred of intelligence from their green clear depths.

“Do I love you?” she asked in a frightened whisper.

“Yes.”

Nancy’s voice was heard:

“Meg, come in for a moment.”

Albert was left alone. His inner being, lately convulsed and disordered, had undergone a new transmutation. Gone were the great lights and clouds that had surrounded

him for days. The balance had swayed to the side of liberation. He had prematurely arrived at conviction, for his sensual intent and spiritual disharmony had not yet fixed themselves on solid roots of sentiment. Dead was the uncertainty, dead the anxiety, dead the expectation, dead all the mysterious potencies that preside at the birth of love. Now he felt for Meg only a kind of esthetic interest or paternal affection. The joy of finding himself master of himself was spiced with the compassion he felt for Meg. By accident he took up the book she had dropped in the hammock and glanced through it. It was an anthology of North American poets. His eye fell on a poem of J. G. Whittier:

TELLING THE BEES

Here is the place; right over the hill
Runs the path I took;
You can see the gap in the old wall still,
And the stepping-stones in the shallow brook.

There is the house, with the gate red-barred,
And the poplars tall:
And the barn's brown length, and the cattle-yard,
And the white horns tossing above the wall.

There are the beehives ranged in the sun;
And down by the brink
Of the brook are her poor flowers, weed—o'errun—
Pansy and daffodil, rose and pink.

Did these lines not describe Fina's house in Villaclara? At that very moment, was she not hoping for him, singing there among her bee-hives to keep her courage true? Was not his Fina the shield against all foolish passions for the future, the crown of roses upon a peaceful brow? Was he not bound to Fina by a love and intimate friendship as incorruptible as a diamond? Meg returned to his side as though seeking protection for her scattered, broken soul. At that moment she was all humility, solicitude, and surrender. She said:

"What you know better than myself I have no need to tell you. It would have pleased me if you never knew, but I am glad that the great good I feel can come from the misfortune. It is true I was mad, that I was bad, very bad. I wish to be good, but don't know how. There come to me at times strange impulses—I don't know from where—that cause me to do evil. If you could know how I have wept at never being mistress of myself! I have come to consider it the influence of my birth, to that dull and continual desperation that has always ruled our house; to that sadness which is not a tranquil sorrow like most sorrows, but a sadness sharp | and poisonous. And then even though I would

commit a fault that would follow me all my life, I decided to run away and I was sure that, once escaped, I should come to be good. I don't know if I am clear, or that you understand me. But I swear I am speaking the truth. As for Ettore— What shall I say! I want to weep. That is one of the things I do without knowing why. But now I feel I am beginning a new life. Never have I felt so good as to-day, so secure of myself, and it is because I can depend on your heart (a pause). Now I say to you, you may speak to my father, and ask my hand."

"Meg, my little darling, are you really good?"

She raised her eyes with a sweet, childish trouble as if to ask, "Can you possibly doubt it?"

"Then let us prove it. If you are sure of yourself, as you say, and feel that a new life is commencing for you, listen to me attentively. I cannot ask your father for your hand, for that would be pure folly. Forget what has passed. I cannot be your lover or your husband. I love you like a big brother or perhaps like a father."

Meg attributed these words to a desire to

withdraw, but looking into Albert's face and noting its noble severity, she understood that she had lost him altogether.

"Why then have you deceived me?"

"I haven't deceived you, Meg. You have been the deceiver, not because you wished to deceive me, but because I have deceived myself."

"Yes, yes, I understand. I have come to love you too much, and too quickly. I understand."

"Perhaps you do."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"To leave to-morrow on the seven o'clock boat."

"Don't you know that your departure may cause father's death—and mine?"

"Your father's death would be a solution. Yours? Is it necessary for me to assure you that you are strong and healthy?"

"I have listened and answered you in perfect tranquillity."

"Then I tell you that life is good as long as we know how to conduct ourselves properly. And I tell you also that you ought to be happy and that you will be happy."

"Happy? I cannot see how."

"Meg, dear little one"—he kissed her forehead—"have hope and confidence."

"What will you say to Papa?"

"Nothing. I shall go before he knows it."

"Do you wish me to come down into the garden to wish you good-bye to-morrow?"

"I should like it, but I think it better that you should not come down."

"Adieu."

"Are you not going to give me a full kiss?"

Albert desired to kiss her forehead, but Meg threw back her head and received his kiss on her lips.

"Farewell, Albert, and see, I do not weep because I am strong." But every word dropped from her lips as though it were a tear.

VI

"Aun hay sol en las bardas."

—*Don Quixote.*

There was the house and the path descending the hill and the stepping-stones across the brook and the tall poplars framing the grounds, the gate of red bars, and the walls red and old.

In his three days' journey, Albert had put off three years of his life, to join the present moment to that when he departed from the Pilares station, when his dream was all of the modest cottage between the woods and the sea. The road from Villaclara whispered: "There is still sunlight in the meadows."

Leaning on the wall, his pulses in agitation, he ran his eye over the garden. The stream was surging through its rocks, the water dancing between the daisies and narcissus, roses and carnations luxuriant along its course. There were Fina's bee-hives and, lying in the grass, a dark form that gathered itself up quickly. A worn face consumed with pain and anger, like an aged Sibyl, met Albert face to face and two hands with epileptic fingers and long nails began to conjure evil spells upon him. From the toothless old mouth came forth a volley of imprecations:

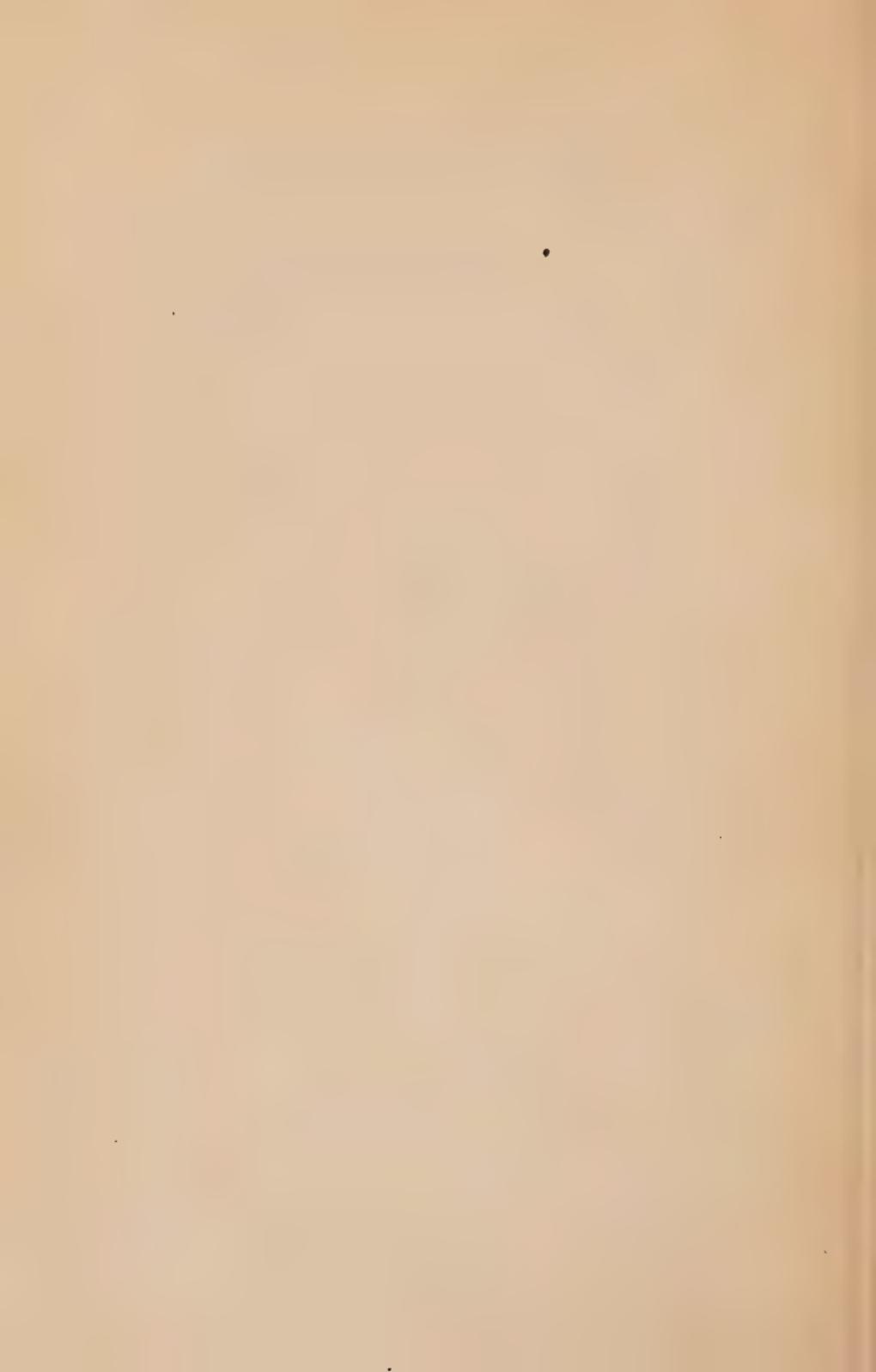
"May the toad's blood poison that tongue of yours—that false tongue. May slimy vipers eat up your face—that face of treachery; may wild hornets pluck out your eyes—your criminal eyes; may the scorpion make his nest in the filth of your evil heart. May Satan burn your soul ages without end!"

It was Aunt Anastasia. Albert had hardly the courage to ask her:

"Fina?"

"You ask that—you who killed her, you renegade!"

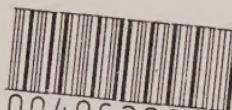




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